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Spiritual conferences on the mysteries of faith, and ...

Henry Collins
(catholic priest.)

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SPIRITUAL CONFERENCES.

SPIRITUAL CONFERENCES

ON THE

MYSTERIES OF FAITH,

AND THE

INTERIOR LIFE.

BY

FATHER COLLINS,

AUTHOR OF "SPIRIT AND MISSION OF THE CISTERCIAN ORDER," "CISTERCIAN
LEGENDS," BONA'S "EASY WAY TO GOD," ETC.



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OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

I.

The Expectation.

"His going forth is prepared as the morning light."

BEFORE the Advent of our Blessed Lord, when He came to do His work of love in this world, we are told in the Gospel, that S. John Baptist was sent first, as an Angel to prepare His way before His face. This was not, however, the only preparation the world had for the coming of its Redeemer. Long years before, the preparation for this great event had been going on. Even before creation took place it had been predetermined in the counsel and foreknowledge of God, and no sooner had man sinned than the healing balm was applied to the wound, in the promise of the future Saviour. God's tears of compassion are seen commingling with Adam's stricken soul; the penitent child and the offended Father are made at one, through the obedience of Him that is to come. The golden hope of

the Messiah was therefore the stay of God's people in every stage of Jewish history. Like a sweet refreshing stream threading its way sometimes amidst brake and thicket, sometimes clear and bright in the light of the noonday sun, so was it with this hope of God's people. They never lost sight of it, for even when most hidden from their labouring eyes, their faith lent them a power to behold what was well-nigh invisible. When clouds were darkest, one ray of light pierced through the encircling gloom : for their hope was grounded on the word of One that cannot lie. His word is sure. Though vision tarry they will wait for it. The Messiah will surely come one day, though He tarry. " His going forth is prepared as the morning light."

2. It was indeed a sad day when Adam, with his back towards Eden, went forth for ever from the Paradise of God, to become a dweller in the wilderness, a sad dark day, a day of gloom, a day of deep distress. Of all the sad human hearts that this world has seen—and oh, how many they have been !—were there ever two hearts so sad as those of Adam and Eve, as, companions in guilt, companions in its punishment, they came forth from the presence of God to the outside wilderness? We are born into a world of sorrow ; we have never known what unmixed happiness is. We soon—alas, how soon for some !—get to know even by our own experience the bitter sense of pain, both of body and mind, but it had not been so with them. Their days had been all bright in that Paradise of God. Not the shadow of a cloud had

dimmed their gladness. They tasted nothing but joy to the full, till the envious serpent came, and stole away the cup of pleasure from their lips. They felt with a sense far keener therefore than ours the desolation of the lot before them. But perhaps on their outgoing from Paradise they hardly realised it to the full. A sterner lesson still was to bring home to them the sad nature of their sin. It was in Abel's mangled form that they saw the drama being played out. With what line shall we measure now the grief and anguish of his mother's torn heart? As she beholds the earth purpled with her son's blood, she cries out "Abel, son of my womb, it is I who am your murderer. This is the ill-fated apple I ate in rebellion against God." Those poor parents recognise themselves as the authors of this ill. Oh, what a contrast this to the happiness of Paradise. Still a ray enlightens their darkness. The blood of Abel cries from the ground for vengeance, but they see in the distance One coming, whose Blood will speak better things than the blood of Abel. Abel is to their eyes the figure of the future Redeemer. God's promise will not fail, "His going forth is prepared as the morning light."

3. Thus it was that God assuaged the grief of our first parents. They had lost the earthly Paradise never to return to it. Never again should its joyous light shine upon them. But in the vision of ages they beheld a better Paradise than that they had forfeited, into which an entrance was to be opened to them by the Blood of the Messias. It was the same with all the ancient

patriarchs and prophets. They all of them looked forward to this Advent, not caring for the things of this life, but confessing that they were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth. What our Lord said of Abraham is to be understood of all the rest, "Abraham rejoiced to see My day; he saw it, and was glad." They saw into the distance, and beheld the Light that had not risen. They knew and felt sure that He was to come as certainly as we expect the dawn of the morning light. To belong to Him even before He came was the sole object of their desires. To be despised for His sake was exceeding joy. Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of the Egyptians: for he saw by faith that to belong to God's covenanted people was to belong to Christ: to give this up was to lose Him. This was the sin of Esau, who sold the promise that the Messiah should come of his seed as the first-born. He sold his interest in Christ. Ruth parted with her country and her religion to gain Christ, and the redemption flowing from Him. David saw that Christ his son should be also his Lord, as being God of God and Lord of Lords. He saw that His kingdom should be an everlasting kingdom, and that He should rule from one end of the earth to the other. The whole Jewish mind was thus deeply impregnated with ideas of the Christ—Christ not as come but as expected. They lived in the thought of Him. The prophets filled with His Spirit predicted His sufferings, and the glory that should follow. They did not fathom altogether the signification of their utterances.

His form in suffering and in majesty was imperfectly descried. Yet it was sufficiently so to fill them with a longing, yearning, expectation for its more perfect unveiling. It was not easy to bring into harmony all that was revealed to them of Him. For He was to be a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity, His look as it were hidden and despised, with no form or comeliness in Him; and yet again He was to be beautiful above the sons of men—the altogether lovely. He was to rule the nations with a rod of iron, and break them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Yet of Him likewise it was said, "the bruised reed He shall not break, nor quench the smoking flax." So deserted and forlorn was He to be, that when He looked for some one to have pity on Him He would find no one, neither would there be any to comfort Him; yet again so sought after that it was said all the kings of the earth shall adore Him, all nations shall do Him service.

How reconcile all these things, and many more, so strongly contrasting with each other as to seem a mutual contradiction? They were unable. The mystery was beyond them; but they believed and adored, and waited in faith and hope for its accomplishment. They were not deceived. This hope was transmitted as an heirloom from age to age, a precious heirloom, which buoyed up their hearts when all else failed. As the days grew darker the expectation grew stronger and clearer, and faithful souls still looked for the redemption of Israel. The Lord was nigh. Simeon had received a promise

that he should not be taken out of this perishable life till his eyes had seen his Saviour ; and faithfully was that promise performed when the aged Simeon beheld in his arms the Word made flesh, Whose going forth had been "prepared as the morning light."

4. But what is to be said of the expectation of the Jews, who still look for Christ to come? Will they be disappointed? Or, as St. Jerome says, will they welcome Him when He comes in glory, Whom they refused when He came in humility? The holy Fathers teach with one voice that before the end of the world the Jews as a nation will turn to Christ. This turning to Christ it is which S. Paul speaks of in his Epistle to the Romans ; "Blindness in part has happened in Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles should be come in, and so all Israel should be saved, as it is written, *There shall come out of Sion He that shall deliver, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.*" His argument is that, as this prophecy was not fulfilled at Christ's first coming, it must therefore refer to His second coming.* Their conversion he also says will be to the world as life from the dead; that is, it will be nothing less than the total resuscitation from spiritual death of the entire earth, which till then will be partly involved in sin and infidelity. These hopes are not for Jews only, but for Christians also, who long to see our Lord triumphantly reigning over the whole earth. They long for the fulfilment of these prophecies, which foretell a day when "the earth shall be full of the know-

* See McEvilly on S. Paul's Epistles.

ledge of the Lord as the covering waters of the sea ; when all shall know the Lord, from the least even to the greatest ; when nation shall not lift up sword against nation any more, nor be exercised to war ; but they shall turn their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into sickles, and idols shall be utterly destroyed." It cannot be said that these and such-like predictions have been at all adequately fulfilled. For that bright time we must wait in hope, in sure expectation that not a word shall fail of all that has been said. Earth will then put on the semblance of heaven, as far as this may be. The triumphs Christianity has hitherto achieved are but a feeble prelude of what shall then be won. How they will be brought about, by the pouring out of what kinds of graces ; how our Lord will reign, and what will be the nature of the presence He shall then vouchsafe, are questions, probably, which must baffle every straining of our searching eyes. It is enough, however, that He shall reign till all enemies are put under His feet. The brightest coming nevertheless still remains, the crowning climax of them all, when He shall gather His elect from the four winds, and shall fold them for ever in His ravishing embraces, bestowing on them the sweetest endearments of His love. Oh, how entrancing will that happiness be, the dark foil of this life's sorrows lending an enhancing charm to its golden splendour ! What else is there worth living for but this one only good, to behold our Lord as He is—to see Him face to face—to know Him even as we ourselves are known? O

amazing depth of love, that our God, Who stands in need of nothing, should thus make Himself over to His creatures to be their light and their joy, and their reward exceeding great. Whatever is less than Him is insufficient for us. We wait for Thy loving-kindness, O Lord, in the midst of Thy temple. We wait for Thine Advent; for the brightness of Thy rising; my soul, wait thou on the Lord, and He shall give thee the desire of thy heart, and thy eyes shall behold the King in His beauty: "His going forth is prepared as the morning light."

II.

The Reception.

"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not, but as many as received Him, He gave them power to become the sons of God."

WHAT a fund of sorrow must have filled the mind of S. John whilst he penned the first words of this passage, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." It is the expression of the amazed sadness of a burdened heart, that looks and wonders, and is at a loss to account for so untoward a result, so opposite to all that might have been expected. The prophet Malachy had said: "The Lord Whom ye seek, and the Angel of the Testament, Whom ye desire, shall come to His temple." The desired One had come, the sought-for Lord had reached them, but what welcome had He

obtained? "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."

How is this rejection of their Christ by the Jews to be accounted for? To what can we attribute it?

It seems incomprehensible that He for Whose coming they had so earnestly longed should, at His Advent, meet with such an ill-reception. To the Jewish mind the thought of Christ's coming was an inseparable element of their national life. It was this that added to their brightest visions of glory a transcendent lustre. They adorned His kingdom with features lifting it high above the ordinary course of all human things. A halo of living light shone around His gracious, glorious form, and the best and most perfect things were but a faint, feeble, image of what would be when their Christ should reign.

When times were darkest all was not lost, for the future was still lit up with the gleaming splendour of His Advent; so that, cast down, they were not in despair; perplexed, they were not disheartened. And so it had gone on, as years succeeded to years, and age to age, amidst the ebb and flow of prosperity and adversity, of gladness and distress. But ever as time went on, the image of Christ their King came out more clearly, vividly, and distinct, blending itself with the inmost affections of their souls, and being to them the life of their life, till at last the day of His Advent arrived,—and what?—

"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."

2. But did none receive Him?

Some few did receive Him ; that is, His Advent was welcome to them (for such is continually the force of the word *receive* in the New Testament), but the greater part did not welcome Him, and to this greater part this expression refers. Nor was it that Him, Whom they had longed for when absent, they rejected when He came. In good truth they had no wish that He should come. It was not the particular shape either which His Advent took, as, for instance, the lowliness of His surroundings, that was the real cause of their rejection of Him. It is true that these things rendered Him more offensive to them, and in a manner contemptible. They were so extremely repugnant to their own taste and ideas, their thoughts and ways of acting.

But the root of their rejection of Him lay deeper. It was that they did not want any Christ at all. They did not think Him to be the Christ. Had they known Him to be the Christ, S. Paul says they never would have crucified the Lord of Glory. They did not then think Him to be Christ, but their wish that He should not turn out to be Christ was father to the thought that He was not. This wish blinded their eyes to the proofs which would otherwise have wrought conviction. But having once rejected Him, their envy determined on His utter downfall. Through envy they delivered Him up to Pilate, for they felt there could be no compromise with Him. If He lived, their power and position were gone. It was on both sides a war of extermination. He on His

part had made no concealment of His sentiments with respect to them. He had publicly reproached them with the most odious vices, casting scorn upon them before the people, and doing away with all their claims to veneration. Thus He had set them at defiance, goading them on to madness, and sealing their rejection of Him.

However, this was but the climax of what had long been prepared. It was but the external manifestation of what had long existed in secret. Even before He began His career we may see the germs of what afterwards developed itself; for when the first announcement of His birth was made by the Magi, even when yet it was uncertain whether the tidings were true, and whether He really were come or not, we are told that Herod was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Far from being delighted at the thought of Christ's Advent, they were annoyed and disturbed. By "Herod and all Jerusalem" is doubtless signified the men of influence and power, whether in the temple or at court; the Herodians and the chief priests, Scribes and Pharisees. The Prophet-King was dreaded by the court as a rival king; by the teachers of the people as a prophet; for they were men who loved the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost places at feasts, and to be called of men, Rabbi. A new generation of men had arisen when our Lord began His ministry, but the old spirit was in them, so that when He came unto His own, His own received Him not.

But let us leave these rulers and pass on to others. It

is said the common people heard Him gladly; they thronged Him, and pressed Him, crowding around Him. They flocked after Him by hundreds and by thousands into desert places. They wished to take Him by force and make Him a king. They were filled with wonder at the miracles He wrought, praising God, and saying that a great Prophet had risen up amongst them, and that God had visited His people: This, and a great deal more. But how long was it to last? At first there is a great flush of success. Our Lord makes more disciples even than John Baptist. The whole world is gone after Him. But wait awhile, and the bright halo is shadowed in gloom. Our Lord knew what would come from the very beginning, for He knew what was in men, and needed not that any should tell Him, so that, when many believed on Him, we are told He did not trust Himself to them. He knew the motives of men, and that many who seemed to be His disciples attached themselves to Him only seeking themselves. Some thought to be great in His kingdom, others ate of the loaves and were filled. But His fan was in His hand to separate the chaff from the wheat. These followers of His shortly discovered their mistake. They were bitterly disappointed. This was not the Messiah they had expected—the carpenter, the son of Mary, with no pomp, no splendour about Him, no gifts to offer, no brilliant triumphs over their enemies to achieve. A strange Liberator and Redeemer this Who could not save Himself. These men did not look for redemption from sin, or for spiritual graces, but for some-

thing more tangible. The treasures He was ready to bestow on them they did not care for. He came, therefore, to His own, and His own received Him not.

This latter class of people were very different from the first-mentioned. The first were from the outset avowed enemies. Their position was clear, marked, and defined. But these latter bore the resemblance of disciples. They sat before Him as His people, but their heart was not whole with Him, and He had to bear with them in their insincerity, sickening as it was. He did not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, but He waited patiently till they should choose their part. All this was, however, a sore trial to His spirit, harder to endure than the defiance of open enemies. It pressed heavily upon Him. "How long shall I be with you?" He cries. "How long shall I suffer you?"

3. Our Lord's teaching on the mystery of the Eucharist was the touchstone which separated the true from the false disciples. From that time many walked no more with Him. The unbelieving hearts were laid open and unveiled. It was to the believing a crisis. As our Lord turned to the twelve, and said, "Will ye also go away?" the answer came, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" and the confession of belief in Him as the Christ the Lord God.

The twelve were not the only ones who remained faithful. There were others also, such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, but they were very few compared with the great bulk of the people; a mere remnant.

These were our Lord's solace when abandoned by the many. Of these He said, "Ye are they who have continued with Me in My temptations." When the Jews sought to kill Him, they wished, like Thomas, to die with Him. Spite of every frailty, their hearts were well disposed. They received Him, and He gave them power to be the sons of God. Mankind are the same in nature and character as they were in the days of our Lord's Advent.

Some become avowed enemies though baptised in His Name. Others are so fickle that He is never sure of them. It is uncertain if they will receive Him lastingly or no. But to as many as really receive Him, to them He gives power to become the sons of God. Oh, most gracious condescension and stupendous love, that God should be pleased to lift us worms of earth to so marvellous a destiny, so out of proportion with the claims of our low nature : that we should be called and should be the sons of God.

Purify me, O Lord Jesus Christ, that when Thou comest in Thy second Advent I may be found like Thee, and may be esteemed worthy to see Thee as Thou art.

III.

Our New Brother.

"Who will give thee to me for my brother, sucking the breasts of my mother, that I may find thee without, and kiss thee, and now no man may despise me."

THAT Incarnation of the Word of God, which we now commemorate in the Church, and which these mystical words of the spouse point out, was not the desire merely of the Jewish nation only, it was a thing the whole human race sighed after. It is for this reason that, in the various traditions of many nations, we have either fabulous records of incarnations of God, or else prophecies that such a thing will one day take place.

There is in the nature of things an infinite distance between God and man. At the outset of creation, however, though this chasm existed, it was not so much felt on the part of man. Man was then in his primeval innocence, and God was pleased to be familiar with him, visiting him often under some created appearance, and thus as it were lessening the distance between the Creator and the creature.

Even after the fall, God still, under creaturely forms, in some respects shadowing forth the Majesty of Him Whom they represented, held communion with His chosen ones. The infinite dignity of the Godhead, in itself incomprehensible, thus stooped by a marvellous condescension to the poor capacities of the nature of man. But God

Himself was never personally united to the forms thus assumed. They were but a mantle, under which He worked; or else they were created intelligences, personating Him, and speaking in His Name. At the best they were but types and figures, foreshadowings of that real manifestation of Himself which was a thing yet to come.

God thus educated men, and kept alive in their breasts that longing which otherwise might have entirely died away.

What He gave was not to satisfy, but to create a hope of something fuller in future times, a ray of light as an earnest of the perfect day. These figurative incarnations were so evanescent, that something more stable was desired. This is why Jeremias cries out: "O Thou Expectation of Israel, the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble; why wilt Thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man turning in to lodge for a night?" A real and an abiding incarnation of God could alone satisfy. "Who will give thee to me as my brother, sucking the breasts of my mother, that I may find thee without, and kiss thee, and now no man may despise me?"

2. Many times, however, these gracious visitations, by the ministry of Angels or other revelation, were withdrawn; as in the days before Samuel, the word of the Lord was precious, and there was no manifest vision. And whilst to some God vouchsafed to speak face to face, as a man talks to his friend, yet to others He was a hidden God, dwelling in the thick darkness, through which no man might pierce.

In the person of such it is that Job says, "Who will grant me that I may know and find Him, and come even to His throne? But if I go to the east, He appeareth not; if to the west, I shall not understand Him. If to the left, what shall I do? I shall not take hold on Him: if I turn myself to the right hand, I shall not see Him."

Though it is in Him we live and move and are, and He is not far from any one of us, yet men searched after Him, and could not find Him. The distance between man and God was not a distance of place, but of natures; man being a thing of flesh and blood, God a pure Spirit.

This was the wall of partition, that seemed so hopelessly to separate man from God.

Buried since the time of Adam's sin in the things perceivable by his bodily senses, he desired thus also to become acquainted with his God, to know and approach to Him. He would behold God in the form of man's nature. One like himself, made like to him in all things, sin only except.

"Who will give thee to me," he said, "as my brother, sucking the breasts of my mother, that I may find thee without, and kiss thee, and now no man may despise me?" It was God Himself Who put this desire into the heart of His creatures. It was He Who had brought about this manner of speech on their part, that He might fulfil their petitions; for His delight is to be with the children of men, and He hastened His word to accomplish it, being very pitiful at the voice of their cry. He would give to

them all that their heart lusted after. The Word should become Flesh, and dwell among them, and they should see His glory.

They should be able to say, "That which our eyes have seen and our hands have handled of the word of Life." Like as we heard, so have we seen; for God Himself should be manifest in the flesh, and should not be ashamed to call them brethren. Thus He would break down for ever the wall of partition, becoming a man like themselves, in all the trials of man's nature—suffering, weariness, and hunger, and thirst, and sorrow, and fear,—so that He might have a fellow-feeling for all their infirmities and temptations. The Eternal becomes a Babe. He, Whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, lies in a little crib. And this is the mystery we celebrate at this time, a mystery ever old but ever new, that "in the fulness of time God sent forth His Son made of a woman." In this mystery desire receives its accomplishment, for God is become our Brother, fed with a little milk; and He that was hidden is seen without, the invisible becomes visible; the chasm is bridged over, God and man are reconciled. We may return the kiss of peace, which He gives to us. We need no longer have the spirit of fear; but may approach with the kiss of love, coming boldly to the throne of grace. And no man may now despise us, for though we be by nature lower than the angels, yet the Most High has now taken that nature by a personal union with it. In taking it, He has transformed and exalted it, so as to lift it up above all created things, and render it

in Him an object of supreme worship. The Angels adore the Son of man, He is lifted up above all principalities and powers, and above every name that is named, in earth or heaven. He, our Brother, Who is clothed with man's nature, is the Head of all.

3. And when God thus grants us our prayer, have we nothing to do? Are we to stand idly gazing in admiration at the glory of the Word made Flesh? He has stooped thus low, that He might raise us up to sit together with Him in heavenly places, that He might give us power to become the sons of God, that He might make us partakers of His Divine nature. I see it, O my Jesus, I see that such is Thy gracious intention; I have paid little heed to this. Sunk in sloth and carelessness, I have thought it enough to believe and to be amazed at Thy marvellous abasements. But it is not enough. I see it, O my Jesus: I see it, and I wish to amend; I am ashamed to see myself raised so little by all Thy efforts, but by Thy grace Thy intention shall be henceforth my aim. I desire to live no longer, but that Christ should live in me: no longer to make provision for the flesh, but to seek the things above where my life is hid with Christ in God. Be pleased, O Lord, to work in me this transformation, for in my own strength I can do nothing; I give myself entirely into Thy hands, mould me after Thy own pattern and transfigure me into Thyself, changing the body of my lowness into the likeness of Thy glorious body, according to the working of Thy mighty power, whereby Thou art able to subdue all things to Thyself.

IV.

The Oil Poured Forth.

"Thy Name is like oil poured forth; therefore young maidens have loved Thee."

WE cannot doubt whose Name it is that the Spouse speaks of with such an outpouring of praise. It can be but that of Him whose Name alone is exalted, and the praise of Him above heaven and earth. There is a Name that is above every name, a Name the Owner of which has said, "I will not give My glory to another," a Name at the sound of which every knee shall bow, and to which every tongue shall confess.

The likening of this holy Name to oil poured out is a comparison of very striking significancy in Eastern countries, because they have their most precious and exquisite perfumes prepared in essential oils, or ointments, made by the art of the apothecary. These were in such esteem, and so costly, that the "divers precious odours and ointments in the house of his aromatical spices" were a part of the treasures, which Hezekias showed in boastfulness to the ambassadors of the King of Babylon. The Gospel history affords us an example both of the preciousness and of the excellent, sweet-smelling, savour of these ointments, where it is recorded that a woman "brought an alabaster box of ointment, very precious, and with it anointed the feet of Jesus as He sat at meat; and the whole house was filled with the odour of

the ointment. And some had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" Such oils and ointments were the possessions only of the rich and wealthy; the deliciousness of their fragrance was a luxury they only could purchase.

The sense of smell is more delicate than any other of the senses; it comes nearest to a thing spiritual; its gratification produces a more keen delight; it penetrates within a man in a most subtle and marvellous manner, re-creating him, as it were, with its refreshing influence, and imparting to him new life. Worn and weary, he revives under its powerful charm, for it seems even to feed up his strength with some secret incomprehensible nourishment. The grosser senses are soon palled with that which satisfies them; but not so here—that which contents has still an inviting charm. Using, therefore, this similitude, the Spouse would say, "As we never are filled too much with the deliciousness of some sweet-smelling ointment, so the young maidens find in Thee and Thy Name a delight that never tires—ever fresh and ever new."

2. When it is said, "Thy Name is like oil poured out," by the word *Name* is signified all those qualities, and that character, which make a person to be what he is, and especially which distinguish him from others, and are remarkable in him. The mention of a man's name brings the man himself before our mind's eye, whether as known personally, or only by certain circumstances of his history. In the Holy Scriptures we meet with many

persons, whose names were either given or changed, on account of some event connected with their personal history. Thus Abram's name was changed to Abraham, Sara's to Sarai, Jacob's to Israel. Moses was so named as drawn out of the rushes ; Esau because he came forth all red from his mother's womb ; Jacob, or Underheel, because his hand was under his brother's heel when he first appeared ; Isaac, or Laughter, to commemorate how his mother laughed with joy that she, old and barren, should be blessed with a son.

Men's names are not now generally given to them from such causes ; they are names of inheritance, taking their significance from the after-events of each one's life, and each one's character. A man's name is a sort of compendium of his character and history. Mention the name of a great military commander of his nation to a soldier, and at once interest and enthusiasm are enkindled in his breast. How dear is the name of a beloved child to a fond mother ! And why ? Because a thousand sweet remembrances crowd into her heart at the very thought of that name—of scenes now long past, but which are still painted by fancy's eye as fresh on her memory, as if they had happened but yesterday ; and her yearning soul melts away with tenderest affection, as they flit life-like before the mirror of her soul.

Such is the effect of a name, and it is something that has a resemblance to this which is meant when it is said, "Thy Name is like oil poured forth ; therefore young maidens have loved Thee exceedingly."

3. The Name, however, here spoken of is not the name of any creature, but that of the great Creator—a Name that represents all that is lovely, all that is excellent, all that is desirable. But when His Name is likened to oil *poured forth*, this signifies not the perfections of the Godhead as they exist in themselves, but as they are manifested in God Incarnate.

Not that the perfections of God are subject to variation, for with Him there is no change, nor shadow of alteration ; as He Himself says of Himself, “ I am the Lord ; I change not ; ” but that, before the Incarnation, these perfections were hidden from men, now they are made manifest. Even when approaching to the Jews, His own people, He came to them “ in the darkness of a cloud,” and so was to them a hidden God ; and the Gentiles were still more ignorant of Him.

His perfections at that time were rather like a fragrant oil close-shut up in its alabaster box, but whose odour is so powerful that it finds its way out through the chinks of the fastenings, and something of its great sweetness becomes known. But by the Incarnation the box was, as it were, broken, and the oil poured out ; so that, as when Mary anointed the Lord the whole house was filled with the odour of the ointment, so then the earth was filled with the knowledge of the glory of God, as waters covering the sea.

By the Incarnation God became manifest in the flesh, when the Word, by Whom all things were made, was Himself made flesh, and dwelt amongst us ; and the

glory of the invisible God was seen in the face of Jesus Christ, Who is the brightness of His glory, and the figure of His substance. For Jesus Christ, being the Eternal God, and one with the Father, could truly say to Philip, "Have I been so long with you, and hast thou not known Me? He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father, and how sayest thou, Show us the Father?" *Jesus*, then, is that Name which is like oil poured out : for, whilst in Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead, He is also, in all the truth of man's nature, one like ourselves in soul and body.

This union of the Godhead and the manhood in His person, is that which gives the charm to all the circumstances of His history. If that Child which is born in the stable were a mere human child, we should look at it with a careless glance, and pass by on the other side. It is the paradox that that little Babe is the God Who made heaven and earth :—it is the seeming contradiction, which ravishes the admiration of our hearts in transports of love and gladness. We cannot sufficiently admire the sweetness of God in stooping so low, and becoming so little, to draw us to Him by the sweet odour of His ointments, thus poured out. These ointments are His condescension, His love of us, His meekness, His wisdom, His forbearing benignity, and a thousand other excellencies, too many for the enraptured heart to count up. It is so all through, in the whole of the life of Jesus, and in His death, resurrection, and glory ; the union of the two natures in one person is that which gives the charm to all.

The little Child at Nazareth, subject to Its parents, learning the carpenter's trade, would be nothing to us were He not Incarnate God. Those words of grace that fell from His lips, such as never man spoke, would lose their force if words of a mere man. If He were but an innocent man, His Passion would excite some pity ; but it is the thought that it is God manifesting His love for men by dying for them, which makes it thrill through us as it does. If He had not raised Himself by the power of His Godhead, and so conquered death and hell, breaking up the gates of the prison-house, because it was impossible that He should be holden of it ; if we did not see here the union of the Godhead with the manhood, all would fall on us dull, dead, and cold. The Name Jesus, representing to us, and bringing to our memory, all these different incidents, is truly like oil poured out, sweet and refreshing and strengthening to the soul, as delicious odours are to the senses of the body.

It is well added, "Therefore young maidens have loved Thee." Jesus Christ is loved by those whose hearts are fresh and pure, untainted by the stain of sin, uncorrupted by the foul touch of a polluting world ; by those who, through a sincere conversion, have become again like little children. This love is the precious grace of the Gospel. Abram was faithful, Job had patience, Joseph excelled in chastity, Moses in meekness, David in religion, Manasses in repentance ; but the grace of love was reserved till God Himself should become man, and teach him to love.

How sweet is this yoke of love, pure and holy ! With this love all that is tedious becomes pleasant ; labours are lightsome, pain is turned into pleasure, and sorrow into happiness. Through this love, things the most hard and uneasy, and most contrary to flesh and blood, are made desirable ; for He has touched them, and His touch has transformed them, giving to them a charm and a relish they did not in themselves possess, so that tribulation is a joy, and loss a gain, if so only we may win Christ, and be found in Him. Then death becomes the gate of life, where we shall live with the Beloved, the Light of our eyes, and the Joy of our souls, our God and our all, our beloved Saviour and Redeemer, Jesus.

V.

The Holy Name.

"Thy Name is like oil poured out ; therefore young maidens have loved Thee."

THE Name here spoken, and which is said to be like "oil poured out," is the Name of Jesus. The oil is the sweet perfume of the excellences of the Godhead. The pouring out is the manifestation of them in His human nature. Yet, notwithstanding the sweet virtue of this fragrance, His Name is not sweet to all. All do not love Jesus. There are some even who hate Him with a keen, bitter hatred. There is no compromise with them :

they are enemies of the Cross of Christ. They have chosen their own path, and work wickedness with both hands greedily. They hate Him as the reprover of their ways, as One who does not prophesy good concerning them, but evil. Such men as these are not content with sinning, but make themselves apostles of iniquity, and declare war against the Most High. The choler of their hearts breaks forth into fury at the very sound or sight of the Holy Name. There are others also who would restrict this Name to its proper sphere. They think the Name of Jesus suitable enough for the Church and for Religious houses. Out of this sphere His Name is an inconvenience, an impertinence, a piece of bad taste. Let Him be content with what is His, and let the world alone. His interference in common matters is not tolerable. Notionally, it is true that His Name is sweet. No one wishes to dispute it. It is all very right that it should be so, and there the matter should rest. Such is the attitude of mind with many a worldly Christian.

To such as these then the Name of Jesus is not sweet. There are many, however, who live a life of sin and of worldliness, to whom yet the Name of Jesus is sweet. These, though their lives are evil and corrupt, have a good heart. They follow a bad way through frailty, submitting to the yoke of evil lusts from a want of hardihood to rise up and make war against what enthralls them. They think they would be miserable without its indulgence. They find themselves now so entangled that the thought of breaking away, although it sometimes

occurs to them, seems almost an impracticable chimera. Yet the Name of Jesus is sweet to them. It is sweet in the ear.

This sweetness of the Name of Jesus in the ear is the first degree. Many, alas ! never get further. All their lives long they love the pleasures of sin and of the world, at the same time that they are not callous to sentiments of better things. They are like those Babylonians sent to dwell in Samaria, who feared the Lord and served their own idols, and could not be got to relinquish their old custom. Or they are like those Israelites of whom God thus complains in the Prophet Ezechiel, "They say every one to his neighbour, Come and let us hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come to Thee, as if a people were coming in ; and my people sit before Thee, and Thou art to them as a musical song, which is sung with a sweet and agreeable voice ; and they hear Thy words, and do them not."

Such as these do not speak against religion. They even hear of it gladly at a convenient season, and they do many things, trying to help forward its influence, and making some sacrifices for it from time to time. When they hear of any one's conversion from the evil ways of this world, they are glad. They think those happy who have got free from its sinful meshes, and who give themselves really to what is good. They hope one day that the Lord will melt their heart also, as He did that of Paul. Whether these will ever be saved God only knows. Some, perhaps, are so, not for their merits, but by an act of grace.

2. The second sweetness of the Name of Jesus is in the heart. It is sweet in the ear when we are glad that He should say, "Behold I stand at the door and knock;" but in the heart when we understand what is added: "If any man open to Me the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

Solomon says, "A soul that is full will tread upon a honeycomb." In vain does the world spread its table, and put forth its best wine to entice those who are replenished by the breasts of those consolations that are better than wine, and that food which is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. This Name gives refreshment in weariness, strength under labour, and comfort in distress. This Name is a stronghold in temptation, a balsam to the wounded, a joy in sorrow. This Name drives away fear, enlightens the mind, and influences the heart with love. This love it is that makes the Name sweet in the heart. It is sweet to us because it brings to the memory all that Christ has done for us from the cradle to the grave, and His great power now as He intercedes continually in heaven for those who put their trust in Him. This Name is therefore a remedy against every evil, terrible to the enemy, and rich in all sweetness to those whom He loves and who love Him; without hearing, or seeing, or speaking this Name they find no content. They thirst with avidity for it as the hart for the brooks of water. They can never have enough, but after filling themselves they are hungry still.

3. By the third degree the Name of Jesus is sweet not

only in the ear, not only in the heart, but also in the mouth. Such sweetness is the overflow of the heart, making the lips to be like a dropping honeycomb. The Name of Jesus pronounced by those who intimately love Him in the heart has an altogether different sound from the same Name when pronounced by a hard and worldly man. It becomes in the mouth of lovers a word of grace, ravishing with the sweetness with which it is uttered ; causing hearts of ice to melt from their coldness at its soft breathing. The grace of so pronouncing the Holy Name, and of those things connected with its love, has been fitly designated unction, as being the accompaniment of the sweet savour of that Name which is as oil poured forth.

O my Jesus, make me to learn the sweetness of Thy Name in all its degrees, for there is no other name given amongst men whereby we must be saved. Thy Name is a Name above every name, at the sound of which every knee shall bow. Write, I beseech Thee, this Name on my forehead and on my heart, for "Thy Name is like oil poured forth ; therefore young maidens have loved Thee exceedingly."

VI.

The Name of Jesus.*"His Name was called Jesus."*

IT was the custom amongst the Jews to give to children a name, of which it could not be said, "What's in a name?" but a name that really was a token of some event or circumstance intimately bound up with the child's history.

Instances of this are to be found in the names Jacob, Moses, and Samuel. God, however, Who alone knows the future, could alone give beforehand a name significative of what was to come. From Him, therefore, the Name of our Lord must come, if His Name was to give token of what He would be. It was also the right of God to choose the Name of His own Son; and He chose the Name of Jesus, meaning Saviour, because He should save people from their sins.

His Name then was called Jesus.

This Name was a Name of power, for the salvation He wrought for men was perfect every way. He did not enter into His glory until He had made a most complete reconciliation of God with men; not until He had altogether blotted out the handwriting that was against them, taking it out of the way and nailing it to His Cross.

First, then, this redemption was entirely gratuitous. "Come," says the prophet, "buy without money, and without any price." We do not buy salvation for a price.

It is wholly a gift, for which we advance nothing as part-payment. We must take it as given gratis, or we shall never get it at all. It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.

We can impute nothing to ourselves, as if to say, "Because of my goodwill God has given me salvation." We must give the whole glory of our salvation to Jesus Christ. "*Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed Nomine Tuo da gloriam;*" "Not to us, O Lord, but to Thy Name give the glory." Not only, says S. Bernard, when we had no good merits, but even when we had many evil merits, then did Christ give us salvation. We had nothing to urge in our own behalf: no redeeming point. We were obliged to lay our hand upon our mouth, having nothing to plead. When thus dumb, Christ made over to us His salvation gratis. This is the case with every baptised child, who brings to the font nothing but sin. Much more is it the case with the grown-up sinner, who cannot even make a single step to salvation without the help of Christ's preventing grace.

2. But He not only effaces our sins: this were too little a thing for Him to do, He is not content with it; He fills us with merits at the same time. He finds us transgressors, and He not only pardons the transgressions, but makes us holy also. He justifies and sanctifies by the same act. He does not, when He finds our souls full of sins, take them away, leaving our souls blank and empty. That were but a negative forgiveness. No; He fills them with substantial gifts and graces, and

pours into them habits of virtue. This He shows to us under the figure of the Prodigal Son. His father did not merely say, "I pardon you," and so leave the matter; but he put shoes on his feet, and a ring on his finger, and gave him the first robe. He reinstated him fully in his lost goods. The Pharisees could not understand the kindness of our Lord towards sinners. They were unutterably amazed at the way He received them, and ate with them. And our Lord told them this parable that He might let them see some of the sweetness and tenderness of His heart for sinners, just lifting up the veil a little by this figure.

3. The salvation also that He gives is in no way restricted to any particular class of men. It is universal. It matters not whether a man be Jew or Greek, bond or free, young or old, rich or poor, male or female. He is rich to all; He is not stinted or narrow; He excludes none from His salvation; He looks all in the face, and presses them, without exception, to receive of His salvation, to accept it at His hands; and if we go to hell, it is because we refused His entreaty, and trampled on His blood. It will be quite our own fault. He wished to be a Jesus to us as well as to others.

4. It is thus that Jesus throws wide open the arms of His love, He makes no exception of persons, nor of offences either. He publishes a general amnesty. When kings publish an amnesty, some very grievous offences are excluded from the provisions of pardon, or the pardon in those cases is not complete; but it is not so with

Jesus, He shuts out none, He is ready to give full pardon to all. The number of our transgressions, though exceeding that of the stars of heaven, does not preclude the freeness of His pardon. Though our sins were like the drops of the ocean for multitude, or countless as the grains of sand on the seashore, we may still have full confidence of forgiveness at this throne of grace. However heinous our crimes, however black their dye, it does not matter, He is the Saviour of all, and saves them to the uttermost, so that we need never be discouraged; though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow, and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool. Pilate, who knowingly condemned the innocent, might have had a free pardon. Judas the traitor He would have washed from his guilt in the Blood he had betrayed.

5. We might have thought that such an ample forgiveness as this could only once in life be offered to us. We might have thought that, if we sinned again after pardon, that thenceforth the gates of heaven would be inexorably shut against us, that we should have now nothing to look forward to but that fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries of God. But it is not so. O blessed Jesus, why hast Thou made pardon so easy? Is it not against Thy interests? Will not the meanness of men's hearts take a wicked advantage of this facility of forgiveness? Will they not sin all the more freely and boldly, because they know that there is a fountain now, filled with Blood, for the washing of the sinner and

the unclean? It is true. This facility of pardon is become a scandal. Men abuse Thy bounty, yet still Thou wilt not hold-in Thy hand. The Jews had their year of the Jubilee but once as the fiftieth year came round, when the captives were set free, all debts forgiven, and every one's lands restored; but Thou keepest a perpetual jubilee, a jubilee ever fresh and new. Not once in life only, or on rare occasions, dost Thou give pardon, but the doors are always open night and day. A few tears of true contrition, and the guilt of years rolls away. A good confession, and the blackest sinner goes forth with absolution bright as an Angel of Paradise. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, Thou bringest about this marvellous transformation by the wonders of Thy grace.

Such is the power of this salvation: so full, so ample. We can never say that the guilt of any sinner is too great to be forgiven. We can put no bounds to the number of times when forgiveness is to be obtained. Our Lord told Peter that he must be ready to forgive, not only seven times, but even till seventy times seven. And did our Lord mean by this number, seventy times seven, a fixed and limited counting of offences? By no means. This number stood rather for a number without number. Our Lord meant to say, so often as thy brother truly repent, and ask pardon, so often shalt thou forgive him. This unlimited disposition to forgive He requires even of us who are evil. How much less then can we limit the overflowings in Him, Who is good. He has

no pleasure in the death of the wicked ; He is forward at the least sign of repentance to receive him to mercy and pardon.

6. This pardon, too, is full and perfect. There need be no purgatory ; if we go to purgatory it is our own fault. Christ is willing not only to save us from hell, but also from purgatory too. It is not His fault if we go there. It is not from any unwillingness on His part to give us the plenitude of pardon. It is simply because our dispositions to receive His salvation are not such as He would wish. There is still in us a certain clinging and affection to our sins, which prevents His grace from working its full effects. If only our spirit of penance were worthy, He would at once cancel all penalties, both temporal and eternal. The good thief had not to wait at all, but at once was received into the haven of grace. He received a plenary indulgence for all his innumerable crimes. We might have the same with the like dispositions. This is what Jesus longs for. He longs to prove in us the truth of His saving Name. He longs to make us lasting monuments of His mercy. He desires that, the moment our souls go forth from the body, they may be received into everlasting bliss, saved from sin, and all its penalties, through the mighty power of His glorious Name.

At the Pool of Bethesda it was only at certain seasons that an Angel came down and troubled the water. Whoever then first stepped down into the pond was healed of whatsoever disease he had. Happy was that man

who had patiently waited, and been so fortunate as to be the first to step down. In the matter, however, of this salvation of our souls, there is no need to wait for the healing influence. At all seasons the grace is ready. It is ready not for one only, but for all. We cannot exhaust its saving power. Esau said in bitterness of his brother, "Rightly is his name called Jacob, for he hath supplanted me, lo ! this second time." May we not say of our Lord, "Rightly is His Name called Jesus, seeing the salvation He offers to us is so plenteous, so complete at all points."

And shall we not love Him for this? How sweet, how glorious is that Name that tells us of such benefits. It is sweet in the mouth ; it is sweet in the ear ; it is sweet in the heart. Its fragrance is like that of oil poured forth. Miserable is that soul that does not thrill with joy at the sound of this Name. Truly this Name only is excellent, and its praise above heaven and earth.

VII.

We Saw His Glory.

" We saw His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

THE feast of the Epiphany is by some called the Christmas of the Gentiles. On this feast, termed by the Greeks, "Theophany, or manifestation of God." our Lord showed His glory to the Gentiles in the persons

of the Magi, according to the words, "We saw His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Let us to-day visit our Lord with them, and ask Him to open our eyes that we also may see the same sight with the vision of faith. As in light there are different rays of various colours, which yet to the eye appear in but one splendour, so was it with our Lord's glory. There were, strictly speaking, three distinct glories in our Lord; but these three, meeting in one person, formed, so to speak, one ineffable glory, each intermingling with and interpenetrating the others, so as not to be absolutely separable from them. These three streams of glory were those of His body, His soul, and His Godhead. The body of our Lord was exquisitely beautiful. When it is said, "There was no beauty or comeliness in Him, and no sightliness that we should be desirous of Him;" or again that "His visage shall be inglorious among men, and His form among the sons of men;" this must be understood of the disfigurements of His Passion, or rather it must not be understood of Himself personally at all. These expressions must be held to teach by a symbol. Now the doctrine of our Lord has nothing attractive in it for the natural heart of man. The natural heart of man sees in it nothing beautiful, but, on the contrary, feels for it the greatest repugnance. It is not His person, but His poverty, His humiliations, His cross, which are thus figured to us as unattractive, without beauty or sightliness, that we should desire them.

He Himself personally had a majesty and a sweetness about Him which were transcendently charming. His presence was kingly, yet gracious. He was far more beautiful than Adam in the primordial glory of the first creation. The first Adam was to the Second only like a figure of plaster compared with a statue of marble. God formed the first Adam to His own image and likeness. Great therefore was His glory and beauty, but the Second Adam was from all eternity, the image of God, Who was His Father not by creation but generation. His body, when He became Man, was formed by the Holy Ghost Himself with limbs of exquisite symmetry. It contained in itself the perfection of all loveliness, majesty, and grace.

"Oh," cries Zacharias, the prophet, "how great is His beauty!" Isaias promising the greatest favour he can think of to the man who works justice, says, "His eyes shall see the King in His beauty." David exclaims in ecstasy, "Thou art beautiful above the sons of men ; with Thy comeliness and Thy beauty, set out, proceed prosperously, and reign." This beauty, more than human, the eyes of the Wise Men were strengthened by faith to behold. It was the glory, not of the son of a man, but of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

2. There was a second glory which lit up the first. The body without the soul is a casket without its gem. A beautiful body with a brutish soul Solomon likens to a jewel in a swine's snout. The soul, then, has a glory

also. The bright intelligence of the soul will lend a charm even to plain features, and oh, what intelligence was there not here ! Solomon's wisdom was the greatest the world had ever witnessed, and, "behold, a greater than Solomon is here." And though in His infantine features there was no unnatural appearance of the knowledge of age, yet a something of the omniscient intelligence of the soul of our Lord gleamed on His childish Face.

But the principal glory of His soul was its sanctity. What a halo sanctity gives to a countenance that has in it no other beauty. How much more then did the Saint of saints shine with dazzling sanctity in His divine countenance, which He filled with the expression of every grace and virtue. How great did our Lord appear here in His littleness. He is grander on His straw in a manger than Herod is in his palace, on a throne of silk and gold. It is not the mere poverty that surrounds Him, but the voluntary choice of it, His willing disregard and neglect of all that splendour and worldly pomp that usually show themselves in a king's court. The Magi saw this, and wondered with great admiration, that He whose birth had been heralded to them by a star in the heavens, should choose so lowly an estate on His entrance to His earthly kingdom. Illuminated by grace, they were ravished with the meekness of this great King, like Zacharias of old, who cried, "Rejoice, daughter of Sion, behold thy King cometh to thee, poor, and riding upon an ass."

In this absence of all show and pomp, they saw the

nature of Christ's rule, that He should sway men not by domineering and violence, but by grace and charity, according to what Isaias foretold, "He shall not strive nor cry out, neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets ; the bruised reed He shall not break, nor quench the smoking flax." They saw that His kingdom was not to be a kingdom of this world, backed by armies, and wealth, and state, but was to be a kingdom of truth, a kingdom of equity, a kingdom of charity. They saw the royal Lion of Juda entering like a Lamb, and they determined that henceforth they would model their rule after the character of His, not lording it over their subjects, but being the servants of all for their good. They no longer cared for pomp and splendour, for they felt unworthy to rule at all ; and as the twenty-four ancients in the Apocalypse fell down and cast their crowns before Him that sat on the throne, so did these three kings fall down before our Lord, for by faith the veil was lifted, and within they beheld a name written upon His vesture and upon His thigh : "KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS." They "saw His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

It was impossible for God the Word to take to Himself a human soul and body, and not at the same time to transfigure both the soul and the body, through their union with the Godhead. Both soul and body experienced at once the inflow of an energy which lifted them high above their own natural standard, and transformed them by its mighty operation to a divine perfection,

utterly transcending all that can be imagined or conceived. All who came in contact with our Blessed Lord perceived in a measure this divine overflow, though not aware altogether of its true character and source. The despising of it was sin ; the grateful recognition of it was grace and blessing. God was manifest in the flesh, even to the wicked ; for which reason our Lord says of the Pharisees, "They have both seen and hated both Me and My Father." Ordinary persons were also impressed. Such a case we have in the woman who cried out, "Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the breasts that gave Thee suck."

The woman did not fully realise Who our Lord was, but she did realise that there was some ineffable blessing about Him. The same effect took place in that band of men who were sent to take our Lord prisoner, and who returned, their task unfulfilled, saying, "Never man spake like this Man." It was a ray of the hidden majesty of the Godhead gleaming forth that caused the soldiers in the garden of Gethsemini to fall backward to the ground, and that filled Pilate with dread. Our Lord was disappointed with Philip because, after being so long His disciple, he had not known Him ; that is, he had not known that as the Father is God, so the Son is God, and he who had seen the Son, had also seen the Father. When then our Lord lay in the crib before them, the Wise Men saw the glory of His Godhead. It was the view of this that filled their hearts with rapturous joy. They never came all the way from the east to do honour

to the King of the obscure Jewish nation, but for the purpose of adoring God made man. The adoration which Herod professed he wished to pay was of the same kind. The Wise Men were not disappointed. There was about Mary a worshipful majesty that proclaimed her to be the Mother of God, and Queen of Heaven. But her Son, in His infantine sweetness, had the majesty of God Himself. It was not a mere Prophet nor a mere King. He was not merely the perfection of the human race ; there was something behind and beyond all this. He was the very God, true God of true God, the God by Whom all things were made. The Wise Men recognised Him as their Creator. Their hearts throbbed and burned as they fell down before Him, with vehement adoration. They bent the knee and worshipped Him, their souls fainting away with excess of love and joy. They opened their treasures, and offered to Him incense, as to their God. In the visible they see Him who is invisible, a glory not of earth, but heaven, " the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Job comforted himself with the thought that he should one day in his flesh see God with his own eyes. This must be our comfort in our state of banishment. One day we shall see that glory which the Magi looked upon. Even now by faith we may see it through a glass darkly, but then we shall see Him face to face, and know Him even as we ourselves are known.



SORROWFUL MYSTERIES.

VIII.

Shadowings of the Rood.

"And behold two men were talking with Him. They were Moses and Elias appearing in majesty, and they spake of His decease which He should accomplish in Jerusalem."



T seems strange at first sight that the subject of Our Lord's Transfiguration should have been chosen as the gospel of a Sunday in Lent. The apparent unfitness, however, of the subject for this season at once vanishes when we note that Moses and Elias, on appearing with our Lord, spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. Our Lord also, at the close of the gospel, warns His disciples to tell the vision to no man, till the Son of man should be risen from the dead. It is not then the Transfiguration, as a mystery, that the Church would here draw us to consider; but rather the death of our Lord, for which this season of mourning is a preparation. As a mystery the Transfiguration has its particular feast at another time of the

year. The appearance of Moses and Elias, talking of our Lord's death, is a symbolical representation of the fact that the law and the prophets bear testimony to the Passion of Christ. Moses is the symbol of the law and Elias of the prophets. As S. Peter says, the spirit of Christ in them foretold these sufferings that are in Christ and the glories that should follow. Can we do better at this time than unite ourselves with Moses and Elias, searching with them what it was that the Spirit of Christ in them did signify, examining the records they have left for our admonition and reading in them the decease which He is to accomplish at Jerusalem?

The first figure of the Passion brought before us in the writings of the Old Testament is that of righteous Abel. He was just, and his brother wicked; to him God had respect, but to his brother God had not respect: seeing that Cain was exceedingly angry against Abel, and going one day with him into the field he rose up against him and slew him. The innocent Abel is a type of that still more guiltless victim of the fury of his brethren, the Son of God made man. O how the hearts of Adam and Eve were rent with grief at the loss of their innocent son! They had never really known till now the disastrous principle introduced into the world by the first transgression. This stroke went closer home than the loss of Paradise. Their crime was now painted in unmistakable characters. The white lips and pallid cheek of their murdered son told them a fearful tale. It was the first time the death of any of the human race had

been seen, and that not an ordinary death, but the hand of their eldest-born had been imbrued in his brother's blood. What woe, what sorrow thus to lose him ! but only, after all, a feeble picture of a sorrow and distress, far more poignant, in the Heart of God at the loss of His Only-begotten, dying on an infamous gibbet, at the hands of guilty men. We know that, absolutely speaking, sorrow cannot trouble the ineffable peace, the undisturbed beatitude, of the Godhead. Yet of this we may be also sure, that there is something in God which answers to, and is the archetype of all parental tenderness and affection ; and that, when it is said God spared not His own Son, these words really mean what they seem to intimate, namely, that the Father, in delivering up His Son to die for us, made not a seeming sacrifice, but a real one. When we attribute passions to God, Who has no passions, it is not an untruth we speak. To do so is on the contrary the best mode we have of arriving at even an imperfect idea of what takes place in the hidden recesses of the Godhead, which are inaccessible to our weak apprehensions. The Holy Spirit then, by recording these moving scenes of parental grief in the Old Testament, would image forth to us the counterpart of them, as existing in the Heart of God, at the cruel sacrifice of His Son. What Eve felt is intimated by the words she spoke on the birth of Seth : " God hath given me a seed for Abel whom Cain slew." The birth of Seth was a little balm for her incurable wound.

The next history bearing remarkably on the Passion, is

that of Abram's sacrifice of his son. God said to Abraham, "Take thy only begotten son whom thou lovest, and go into the land of vision, and thou shalt offer him for an holocaust upon one of the mountains that I shall show thee." See how God particularises each painful point of the sacrifice: thy only begotten Isaac, signifying Laughter, whom thou lovest—a three days' journey with his son, that the bitterness might steep his soul—offer him for a holocaust, that is, a victim wholly consumed, not a lock of hair for a relic. Then consider the words of Isaac carrying the wood and the fire: "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the victim for the holocaust?" Oh, what anguish, what pain unutterable shot like an arrow through the heart of the bereaved Abram at those simple words of his boy. Abram, however, was spared the completion; not so the Eternal Father. With Him the sacrifice was consummated. The same parental bereavement is pictured forth in Jacob: "You have made me to be without children. Joseph is not living, Simeon is in bonds, and Benjamin you will take away. All these evils are fallen upon me." Jacob lamenting over the torn coat of Joseph dabbled with blood, what is it but an image of the Eternal Father bewailing the torn and mangled Body of His crucified Son?

These scenes of parental grief are closed by that of David, mourning for the death of his favourite son Absalom. He went up to the chamber over the gate, weeping as he went, and crying, "Oh, my son Absalom, Absalom my son, who would grant me that I might die

for thee! Absolom my son, my son Absolom!" Absolom is a type of Christ, not in all points, but in his being his father's darling child. Look into the future, and what do you see in all these histories but the Eternal Father brooding over His woes, bewailing the decease His Son will one day accomplish in Jerusalem.

But the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. Hence His utterances by the mouths of inspired men reveal sometimes the things of the Father, sometimes those of the Son. He takes of them and shows them to men, either by figures or by express words, thus partially unveiling those mysteries, the complete knowledge of which is inscrutable and too deep for human ken. To the eye of God all the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Mosaic Law bore reference to the Passion of His Son, more or less distinctly. They were earthly reminders of things that were sealed in the heavens, as one day to take place. All the Old Testament, in one way or other, turns to this point, prefiguring the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow, disclosing in symbol the decrees of heaven. The Spirit of God is ever repeating the same tale, though the form of its utterances be varied. He broods continually on the subject, returns to it when we least look for it. When we are expecting a cry of triumph there is a sound of woe; and that woe concerns the Passion of our Lord. It is as it were burdening the heart of God, finding some sort of relief by these external manifestations.

2. In the Prophets and in the Psalms it is the actual circumstances of the Passion with which the mind of the Spirit is principally occupied, rather than with the Passion in figures. The details of it, to be gathered from the inspired authors, are at the same time so minute and so abundant that nothing of importance seems to be omitted by them. One circumstance, however, is given by one writer, and another by another, the same Spirit inspiring all, but dividing to every one as it pleases Him. When all the points are gathered together from the various writers, they form so complete a history, that they would appear, to one ignorant of inspiration, to have been inserted after the events took place. But by faith our eyes penetrate the cloud, and behold the concealed form of Him Who afterwards became the Son of man. He is talking by His Spirit with Moses and Elias, with these prophets and righteous men, and the subject of their words is the decease which He will one day accomplish in Jerusalem. Sometimes they talk of Him, sometimes it is He Himself who calls for sympathy by relating His own distresses. They speak of Him as when in the Lamentations it is said, "Christ the Lord is taken in our sins, to Whom we said, Under Thy shadow we shall live among the Gentiles:" or as when Isaias says, "He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our sins, He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb, as a lamb before his shearers, and He shall not open His mouth. He was reputed with the wicked, and He hath borne the sins of many, and hath prayed for the

transgressors." Or, as in Zacharias, where it is said, "What are these wounds in the midst of Thy Hands, and He shall say, With these I was wounded in the house of them that love Me." Such speech do the prophets hold respecting His bitter Passion. He Himself, under the guise of those who represent and foreshadow Him, opens up its dark mysteries with mournful complaints. He complains of the traitor: "If My enemy had reviled me, I could have borne it; but it was thou, a man of one mind, My guide, and My familiar friend, who didst take sweet meats together with Me: in the house of God we walked with consent. And they weighed for My price thirty pieces of silver." Of the scourging He says: "The wicked have wrought upon My back;" and again, "I am ready for scourges, and My sorrow is continually before Me." And of the cruel mockeries He says in Isaias, "I have given My Body to the strikers, and My Cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I have not hidden My Face from them that rebuked and spat upon Me." Of the Crucifixion, and what occurred during it, He says, "They have pierced My Hands and My Feet, they numbered all My Bones. They looked and stared upon Me. They parted My garments among them, and upon My vesture they cast lots. Friend and neighbour Thou hast put away from Me, and My acquaintance, because of My misery. And I looked for one that would grieve together with Me, but there was none; and for one that would comfort Me, but I found no one. They gave Me gall to eat, and in My thirst

they gave Me vinegar to drink. All they that saw Me laughed Me to scorn, they wagged their heads, saying, He trusted in the Lord, let Him deliver Him, let Him save Him, seeing He delighteth in Him." The sorrow of those who came to the Crucifixion and returned, smiting their breasts, is described by Him in the prophet Zacharias : " They shall look upon Me, whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for an only son, and they shall grieve over Him, as the manner is to grieve for the death of the first-born. In that day shall there be great lamentations in Jerusalem." When Moses and Elias talked with our Saviour on the Mount, in the cloud of the Transfiguration, they did but recapitulate what the Law and the Prophets had said long before, speaking to our Lord, and He with them, of the decease which he should accomplish in Jerusalem.

3. If Moses and the Prophets were well understood, then the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was no new thing; according to them He ought there to suffer, and so to enter into His glory. This Lamb was slain from the beginning of the world, if not in fact at least in prevision. He was the true paschal Lamb, that taketh away the sins of the world. It is His blood, sprinkled on the doorposts of our hearts, that prevents the entrance of the destroying Angel. He is the true Scapegoat, upon Whose head are laid all the sins of the people, Who is driven out of the camp into the desert, to be devoured by the wild beasts. It is His blood which is carried by Himself, the true High Priest, into the Holy of Holies not made

with hands. He is the end of the Law, the end of all typical observances and ceremonies, the perfect antitype of all figures. Without Him and apart from Him all that went before is dark, and loses its true significance. He is the key to its hidden sense. When Moses and Elias appeared with our Lord on the mountain, their faces and garments shone as His, but with a borrowed lustre. He Himself was the source of that radiance more dazzling than the sun, and brighter than the light they received at its beams, not having it inherent in themselves, as He, but first drinking in from Him of the fulness of its effulgence, and then in turn shedding forth of what they had so received.

The ancient Saints knew that one day that which they went through would have a light shed on it by Him. Their eyes were already fixed on that light in the far distance. Abraham saw it and was glad. He saw it in the mystical sacrifice which he had to offer instead of his son. Isaac likewise doubtless saw it in the obscurity of faith. His three days' journey prefigured the three years' ministry of our Lord. His ascending the mountain with the wood was a figure of the going up to Calvary; his being stripped of his garments, his submitting to be bound and laid on the wood, as a willing victim, all told of a future mystery, but above everything else the sacrifice provided by God in his stead. Years after, that scene must have lived in his memory, as though it had but yesterday taken place. As he went at eventide "to meditate in the field, the day being now well spent," what

but such mysteries as these were the subject of his deep study? He and all the ancient Saints saw what we do, though not with the same fulness. They did not rest in the things before their eyes, but looked onwards to that greatest of mysteries, which should one day have place.

At times their eyes seemed almost to pierce the veil, illuminated by a light from on high; it was neither fully seen nor entirely hidden. But with all its obscurities, it was the same thing they saw which the Church now directs our attention to; which Moses and Elias spoke of on the Mount, when they appeared with our Lord in majesty. It was His decease which He should accomplish in Jerusalem.

IX.

The Passion in Foretaste.

"I am ready for scourges, and My sorrow is continually before Me."

DURING these days of Passiontide, the stream of our thoughts naturally turns towards the sufferings which the Son of God undertook to endure for our sakes. When so employed, we ought not only to consider the actual sufferings He underwent at the time of the Passion, but those He endured also by anticipation. The foreboding of future woes is a real suffering in itself; nay, with us this prelibation is often far more painful than the actual woes, when they arrive. It was not so with His.

The woes of the Lord mounted to their climax when He drank up the last dregs of the chalice, and cried out, "It is consummated. It is finished." But the distressed looking forward to them was a true and integral part of His chalice.

It is expressed in the words of the Psalmist, "I am ready for scourges, and My sorrow is continually before Me."

1. The foreboding of the Passion did not begin with our Lord when He was made man for us : it stretches far back into the hidden sanctuary of His Divinity. The thought of the Incarnation had existed from all eternity in the mind of God. It was not a decree of any possible God-man, but of the very identical Christ, Who came afterwards in time, and Who, being the Author of salvation to many, was to be perfected by His Passion.

This decree included by prevision the permitted fall of man, and the consequent redemption of him, by the humbling of the Godhead.

The spirit of sacrifice, which is that of love, had its hidden source in the mysterious depths of the Divine nature. That the Word should become man, and should stoop to take upon Himself the form of a servant, would not content it. He must debase Himself further. He must go to the amazing length of dying on a gibbet for the love of those whom He came to save. Such was the scheme of redemption planned by the Divine Wisdom. When Adam sinned, God might have wiped him out of the catalogue of His creatures, and have made in his

place a new and a better race. Then the whole human family would have been stifled in their source. God did not choose to do so. He would redeem fallen man. He would not only bring him back to the level of the condition from which he fell, but even exalt him far higher than he was before; but at what a cost! Instead of taking vengeance on the criminal, He would substitute Himself in the criminal's stead; and so, as one of the race, bear in His own person the full penalty of the crime, not of Adam's sin only, but of all the multiplied transgressions of which that sin was the fruitful parent. At this stupendous cost was man's redemption to be bought. God's great love for man made Him comply with the hard conditions. That it was a real sacrifice on the part of God is taught us by the words, "God spared not His own Son."

But in vain do we try with our short line to sound the unfathomable abyss, and to ascertain how the Godhead, which is ever unchangeable, and cannot undergo loss of anything, is capable of making a sacrifice.

This mystery is true, but super-intelligible. We know it by faith, but even of this our own knowledge we can give to ourselves no clear account. The resolve which our Lord made, before He was actually made man, contained in itself the germ of all His future sacrifice. This resolve was made from all eternity. There is no such thing as succession of time with God; with Him one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Before the mountains of the earth had been established

in their place, or the waters of the sea had been gathered together, or the firmament of the heavens had been stretched out ; before all those countless ages had rolled by, when the earth was being prepared for the habitation of man, Christ, as God, could already say, " I am ready for scourges, and My sorrow is continually before Me."

He looked forward, so to speak, to the time of His Passion, and expressed His readiness for its scourges. Seeing that the sacrifice of bulls and goats could never appease the anger of His Father, He made Himself ready as a victim, and said, " Lo I come, in the head of the book it is written of Me, to do Thy Will, O God." When, however, the Word of God became incarnate, at once the spirit of sacrifice took possession of His human soul. Christ's human soul received its dispositions from the person of the Word, that is the Son of God, the second person of the Divine Trinity, Who had assumed it. He it was that governed supremely that soul and body, that were hypostatically united to Him.

The human will conformed itself entirely to the Will of the Divine Person. The two wills, the Divine and human, were in complete accordance. It was not possible it should be otherwise, seeing it was the same Person that exercised two wills, each moving freely in its own sphere, the Divine Will not enfeebled by the Word's assumption of a lower nature, and the human will having its freedom in no wise impaired, because exercised by a Divine Person. The human will was strengthened by this union to choose freely all that was good, and noble, and per-

fect. That which the Son of God had willed as God, He now also willed as man. He willed as man to die for the human race. He offered Himself as a victim, to be saturated with reproaches. He prepared Himself for scourges from the very outset of His human career, when but newly conceived in the womb; and from that hour till His death His sorrow was continually before Him.

Long therefore before the actual day of His Passion had arrived, our Lord had mentally forestalled all, by a clear presentiment of the coming evils. The presentiments which men sometimes have of the woes that are to befall them, are, at the most, but vague and indistinct, shadowy forecasts of events that are to follow. Not so, however, was it in our Lord's case. He had ever before His mental vision, in clear outline, all the incidents of His Passion, down to the most minute circumstances. The conception of each circumstance was as clear as if His whole attention had been riveted on it alone. The view of one part did not dissolve, that the attention might fix itself on another. The whole was presented before Him at one and the same time, so that He might view it, as it were, in a single symbol. His woes were gathered together into one appalling scene, and with all their accumulated force pressed His soul. The concentrated bitterness of all was presented to Him in a single chalice, the dregs of which He was to suck out. Not a moment was free, but at all moments the same everlasting scene was continually before him.

2. His sufferings were to be of two kinds, one of the,

body, typified by "scourges," the other of the soul, signified by "sorrow." He saw all in both kinds. He counted the number of the stripes. He tasted the vinegar and the gall. He felt the nails in His Hands, and heard the strokes of the hammer. The robe of scorn was already upon Him, the shouts of "Crucify Him" resounded in His ears. The shame and the fear were in His soul by an anticipated experience. The sins of men gathered round Him, and became His, Who knew no sin, and the cloud of wrath concealed the Father's Face from shining upon Him. Such was the dread foreboding of His Passion which the Son of God endured the whole of His life. He never got used to it, so that the pain might slacken somewhat of its intensity. On the contrary, it was a pain which grew, day by day and year by year, more and more afflicting.* As years went by, that fullness of knowledge of all future things, which He possessed in the fund of His soul, was made over to His mental faculties, so far as they are exercised by the organs of the body. The knowledge transmitted to His soul by the Godhead flowed into them, as they became disposed for the reception of its fulness.

Greater keenness was thus added daily to the piercing afflictions of His soul. When also He came in contact with the foes of His mission of love, when they gnashed on Him with their teeth, when they took up stones to cast at Him, when they would have hurled Him headlong from the brow of the hill on which their city was built—all

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* See note at the end.

these things both confirmed and corroborated the knowledge He already possessed, and were revelations to Him by experience of what He might expect at their hands. And though at these times, His hour not being yet come, He escaped from their hands, He knew well enough that this baffling of their malice for awhile would only whet the appetite of their rage, and that their implacable hatred would never rest till glutted with His blood. He prepared Himself therefore for scourges, and His sorrow was continually before Him. Had He chosen, He might so have sustained the human nature by the force of the Godhead as to have exalted it above both mental and bodily sufferings. Had He chosen to allow that beatific vision, which His soul always enjoyed in its superior part, to descend and flow into the inferior, His pains, mental and bodily, would have been at an end. But He gave His poor human nature no comforting help. He would endure the conflict as a man, with the ordinary helps of a man. Even in His greatest need, in the trying Agony in the Garden, we see Him supported, not directly by the Godhead, but by the ministry of Angels. He left Himself in the extreme poverty of His human nature. His kneeling supplication, His prolonged and protracted prayer, His strong cry and tears, His being heard for His reverence, are all the attitude of One Who put aside the privileges of the Godhead, and was found in habit as a man.

He exempted Himself from nothing of the trials and afflictions of the race, nor from any of those weaknesses

of human nature which do not imply the taint of sin. About our Lord there is no stoical indifference to suffering ; on the contrary, there is an extreme sensibility. The anticipation of the Passion affects Him most keenly, fills Him with dismay. Even at the outset of His ministry, in the midst of the first flush of success, the thought of it is present to Him, and we hear Him speaking of how the Son of man should be lifted up ; but as the day draws near it is an often-recurring theme of sorrow. It is true that sometimes He plainly speaks, to forewarn His disciples, and that they may not be taken by surprise ; as, when He drew them aside and told them how He must suffer many things, and be rejected by the ancients, and be scourged and crucified. At other times, however, not so, but rather it is His burdened Heart giving expression to its own distress ; the veil uplifted for an instant, and the anguished expectation revealing itself to our eyes. An instance of this is found in the discourse He made when He was told by Philip and Andrew that certain Gentiles, who had come to adore at the Feast, wished to see Him. He expatiated on the glory His elect will have with Him, but suddenly breaking the thread of His discourse, He interrupts Himself with the words, " Now is My soul troubled ! and what shall I say ? Father save Me from this hour." It would appear as if suddenly before His mental vision rose up distinctly, in all its terrible details and circumstances, the tragedy of His Passion. His soul quailed at the spectacle. Should He go onward to the completion of

the awful sacrifice, or should He draw back : "What shall I do? Is there no means of escape? Father, save Me from this hour." Our Lord was not obliged in rigour to die for man. The Father's Will in this respect must not be supposed to be absolute, but rather as proposing it to the free acceptance of His Son. Mankind even could have been saved some other way, in the resources of the Divine Wisdom, though not so excellently. It was, however, only the inferior part of the human nature which shrank from drinking that chalice of intensest agony; the superior part in an instant rejoins, "But for this cause I came unto this hour." The sacrifice then of our Lord was not only costly in itself, from the fact of His being God as well as man, it was costly also in His sufferings as the Victim. His acceptance of His destiny, each time it came visibly before His mind, was a sacrifice most precious, for each time He must bid the fainting lower nature to acquiesce in the hard lot prepared for it. This is intimated by the words of S. Luke, which tell us that, when the time of His assumption drew nigh, He *set His face stedfastly* to go to Jerusalem. By the *setting of His face* is signified the fixed and determined will, by which He resolved to go through all, refusing to yield in the least to any repugnances.

Each item of His Passion had for Him its own special pain. He Himself mentions the mocking, the spitting, the scourging, and the crucifying, and later on the betrayal. That the scribes and Pharisees should compass His death through envy and hatred might be looked for

in the natural course of things, but that one of His college of Apostles should be the traitor was an anguish inexpressible. His own little sanctuary invaded ! what shame ! and pain ! There is a bitterness in His speech on this matter : " Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil ? " He felt it keenly. At the Last Supper He continually recurs to the burdensome thought which afflicted His heart ; " Ye are clean," He says, " but not all." " He that eateth bread with Me, shall lift up his hand against Me." He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, " Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you shall betray Me."

The presentiments our Lord had of His Passion reached their climax at the time of His Agony in the Garden. There that cloud which had at first appeared on the hedge of the distant horizon, small as a man's foot, had overspread the whole heavens, and the gathered storm fell on His devoted head. Even here, with the full view of His imminent Passion, His fate as it were sealed, we see Him still as it were hoping for some issue, some way of escape, and, with all the shrinking feebleness of human nature, asking, if it be possible, that the chalice might pass from Him. Yet ever He asserts His willingness to accept the fulness of the distress that awaits Him, without any diminution ; " Not My Will, but Thine be done."

Far back then in the hidden recesses of His eternity, and up to the furthest limit of His earthly life, there is seen the same preparedness, the same cry sounds forth :

"I am ready for scourges, and My sorrow is continually before Me."

Lord, make us also ready for scourges, make us ready to accept every sorrow for love of Thee.

* * The doctrine of De Lugo on our Lord's increase of knowledge is here followed, which is thus summed up by Franzelin in his "De Incarnatione."

Now, regarding the time and mode in which Christ began to have this knowledge, the opinion of Cardinal de Lugo seems very probable (dist. 21),—namely, that it was communicated to Him by degrees, and as He advanced in age. For, since the use of this knowledge is not independent of the bodily organs, rightly does God seem to have accommodated its beginning and increase to the natural constitution itself of the organs. Much more evident is this respecting that knowledge of His, which was simply acquired, and experimental.

Jesus then, in a sense peculiar to Himself, increased, as in age, so in this knowledge, considered in both its modes. And in this sense may be understood the commentaries of some of the Fathers (on Luke ii. 52), which seem to attribute a true advance in wisdom to the most sacred humanity. In this way is also seen how the infancy of Christ was true and not apparent only. Many other actions also of His, as for instance His being struck with wonder (Matt. viii. 10; S. Thom. iii. § 15, 2-8), according to the condition of men, making the journey of this life, find their best explanation this way. "Christ," says De Lugo, "like other men, had regularly no human operations, except as dependent on organs and dispositions suitable to nature. He did not walk till His members were well disposed for it; He did not speak in His infancy. He had, therefore, no phantastic human operation before the organs were rightly fitted for it. He had not, therefore, the human operations of understanding, because this depended on the fancy, and the fancy on an organ disposed for it. I have said He had not the *human operation of understanding*, so that I might exclude the knowledge which is *Beatific* and *infused*, and natural to a separated soul. These operations were not the operations of man as man, but the operations of the soul alone, altogether independent of matter." (De Lugo, dist. xxi., § 1, N.S. ii. See also Suarez, dist. xviii. 25; Vasquez, xli. 50.)

X.

Procession of the Palms.

"Fear not, daughter of Zion, for behold thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt."

SIX days before the Pasch, says S. John, our Lord came to Bethany, where Lazarus had been dead, whom He had but lately raised to life. It soon became noised abroad that He was there, and the next day a great multitude of people who had come up to Jerusalem for the festival day, having heard that He was coming thither from Bethany, went out to meet Him to escort Him to the city in triumph. From hence has arisen the yearly commemoration of this event on what we call Palm-Sunday.

The little village of Bethany was situate about a mile and a half from Jerusalem, on the eastern side. It is now called Lazari, taking its new name from Lazarus, who was there raised by our Lord from the dead. It lies on a small table of rocks and broken ground, and is on the east of Jerusalem, the last collection of human habitations before the wild desert country that extends as far as Jericho. Between Bethany and Jerusalem is the Mount of Olives; the summit of the mount is, however, screened from view by an intervening ridge. Also between Bethany and Jerusalem lay the village of Bethphage, which was nearer to Bethany than to Jerusalem. Our Blessed Lord lodged in the village that night, the

sixth before the Pasch, and in the morning He continued His journey to Jerusalem.

There are three roads from Bethany over the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem. One passes by a long circuitous route over the northern shoulder of the mount. A second, which is very narrow and steep, being but a footpath, passes in the middle over the mountain-head; and a third is the continuation of the ordinary road from Jericho to the Holy City. It is probable that on the occasion of the Procession of the Palms this last road was the one by which our Lord entered Jerusalem.

He had but a little while left Bethany when He sent two of His disciples to the village over against them, that is, to Bethphage. There He told them they would find an ass and her colt, which the owner would allow them to bring for His use. They did as He bade them, and having brought them to Him, they spread their garments on the colt, and set Him thereon. Thus our Lord began His triumphal procession to Jerusalem, according to the prophecy of Zacharias, "Behold thy King shall come, sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass."

The prophet would here call attention to the absence of all pride and ostentation of grandeur in their Messiah. To ride upon horses is continually spoken of in the Scriptures as the mark of pride. Horses were used almost exclusively for purposes of war. It was not beneath the dignity of princes to ride upon asses, for the ass of the East is both much larger in size than the ass

of these countries, and has a much nobler appearance as well as greater spirit and swiftness of foot. There was nothing, then, beneath the dignity of our Lord in using for His entry into Jerusalem the ass's colt on which never man had sat. In doing so, He mingled together dignity and humility.

His intended coming had already brought to Bethany a large number of His disciples, coming to do honour to their Lord, and to see Lazarus also, whom He had raised from the dead. On the road He encountered other vast multitudes still coming from Jerusalem to meet Him. Thus two streams of people met; the one pouring forth from the city towards Bethany, the other accompanying our Lord from Bethany, having already arrived whilst He was there. As they came through the gardens and orchards, whose clusters of palms rose on the southern quarter of the Mount of Olives, they cast down branches from the trees as was the custom at the Feast of Tabernacles, and so moved onwards towards Bethany. From Bethany, accompanying our Lord, streamed forth another multitude of men, and as our Lord proceeded onwards, riding on the ass's colt, the enthusiasm increased. As the Raiser of Lazarus from the dead, they recognised Him as their Messiah.

The road soon loses sight of Bethany. It is a rough, but still well-defined, mountain track over bare rock, or ground strewn with loose stones. To the left is a steep descent, and to the right it slopes up to the top of the mount. Fig-trees are here and there to be seen shooting up from

the rocky soil. The crowds that came out from Jerusalem, having met our Lord, greeted Him with loud cries of welcome, and turning back with their faces towards Jerusalem, cried, Hosanna, strewing their palm branches, and twisted mats of boughs or leaves in the way, to form, as it were, a carpet for the animal on which He rode to pass over. Others loosed the mantles which they wore, and threw them like a carpet across His rugged pathway to do Him honour, and to supplicate His protection.* The procession of our Lord with those that followed Him is not very far out of Bethany, before it mounts over the ridge of the hill, and begins the descent of the Mount of Olives towards Jerusalem. At this point of the road the eye first catches a view of the south-eastern corner of the city. The temple and most of the north side are yet hidden by the slope of the mount on the right; but that part which was emphatically termed the City of David opens upon the view. It was just at this precise point, "when He was coming near the descent of Mount Olivet, that the whole multitude of the disciples began with joy to praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying, "Blessed be the King Who cometh in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed be the kingdom of our father David. Hosanna in the highest." Thus the multitudes that went before,

* Mr. Robinson (vol. ii. p. 162) mentions how, when the inhabitants of Bethlelem were imploring the English Consul of Damascus to aid them, they threw their garments under the feet of his horse, as he rode along.—ROBINSON'S PALESTINE.

and the multitudes that followed, cried, answering to one another. Some of the Pharisees from among the crowd murmured, and begged of our Lord to rebuke His disciples; but He answered them, pointing to the rough stones, with which the road was strewn, "I say unto you that, if these were to hold their peace, the very stones will cry out."

The procession moves on, and the road descending somewhat, the city, of which but a glimpse had been caught, is now again concealed by the intervening ridge of the mount. It is but for a few minutes, and again the path ascends. It climbs up a rugged hill, till a ledge of smooth rock is reached, and at once the whole city is displayed before the view. It was a splendid and dazzling spectacle. No city of all the west, except Rome, equalled the splendour of Jerusalem. It was a city of palaces. On the north side rose the majestic temple of the God of heaven, built up with costly stones that ravished the admiration of the beholder. All had only lately been magnificently restored with most lavish expense by the Herodian monarchy. Beside the temple itself, there were those massive walls and gigantic gateways which form so imposing a part of the existing remnants of the old courts of the temple. The palace of Herod, and the high towers and walls he had built, were amongst his most celebrated works. Interspersed with all the splendid buildings of the rich and noble were the beautiful gardens and terraces at the western quarter of the city. Below stretched the valley of Josaphat.

through which ran the brook Cedron, joined at the west by the valley of Hinnon ; while close at hand were the green slopes of the mountain, with its gardens of olives and pleasure grounds.

Such is a feeble description of what met our Lord's eyes when He beheld the city, and wept over it. He wept, whilst around Him was a delirious enthusiasm of joy. He wept, but why ? Because He knew that the city which lay before Him, so fair and beautiful, was a city doomed to utter destruction. But it was not the throwing down of the houses of stone, or even that men who must die should die a little before their time, that caused the cheeks of the Son of God to be wet with tears. He looked beyond, at a far more appalling sight. He saw the souls of men, for whom He should give His Blood, hurried off to abodes of eternal woe. 'This made Him cry, "Oh ! if thou hadst known, at least, in this thy day, the things that are for thy peace ; but now they are hidden from thy eyes."

They descended the mount, and entered Jerusalem by the Golden Gate, which looks towards the east, and is not far from the temple.* Thither He entered, and with zeal drove out all that sold and bought in the temple, and, cleansing it of these defilements, said, "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves."

Such is a brief sketch of the event which the Church

* The Golden Gate is always kept closed by the Turks, because, according to an ancient Turkish tradition, the Christians will one day enter it, and take the city.

commemorates on Palm-Sunday. This procession of our Lord was the figure of a greater triumphal course, which He will make, when with His elect He enters the gates of the New Jerusalem. The multitudes that go before are the patriarchs, prophets, and kings, who, with Abraham, saw Christ's day afar off, hailed Him as their King, and died in faith, not having received the promises. These cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David," hoping in Him as their future Redeemer. Those that follow after, are that great multitude of tribes, and tongues, and peoples, clad in white robes, and having palms in their hands, whom S. John saw standing before the throne of God. They are the children of the Church who have overcome the wicked one, and own Christ alone for their King and Saviour. These answering cry Hosanna. It is no longer a supplication, but a joyful greeting of their King. As He approaches the heavenly city the everlasting doors will be lifted up that the King of glory may come in. There will be no need of cleansing the temple there, for there nothing defiled can enter. If we do not choose now to cry out Hosanna, God will make of the stones children of Abraham, who shall raise their voices to His praise. If we now join in celebrating His earthly triumphs, winning our victories over sin by His Blood, we may hope to be of those who shall sing the glad Hosanna with palms in their hands, as they enter that heavenly city above, whose Maker and Builder is God.

XI.

The Way of the Cross.

"Attend, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow."

THE first scene of the way of the cross is laid in the Garden of Gethsemani. The supper room, in which our Lord kept the Pasch with His disciples, stands upon Mount Sion. It was converted into a church by S. Helena, but the Turks now use it as a mosque. Pilgrims to Jerusalem are still allowed to see it. It is about a mile and a half from Gethsemani. When Judas had gone out, our Lord held His last conversation with His disciples, and made them His last discourse. This finished, He went out with them to the Mount of Olives to the Garden of Gethsemani. This garden is situated on the opposite side of the brook Cedron. It is about seventy yards in length and in breadth. There still remain in it eight very aged olive trees, whose appearance is so different from that of all others on the mountain that it has always struck even the most indifferent observers. Their gnarled trunks and scanty foliage are evidences of their immense age; and, as it is ascertained that olive trees live on for thousands of years, there is every reason to believe that these venerable trees were the very ones under whose shadow the Lord suffered His agony and bloody sweat. Such is the tradition preserved from the time of Constantine. An ancient book of some three

hundred years ago says there were then nine olive trees ; only eight now remain.

Towards the further end of the garden is a grotto of about fourteen feet in diameter. Its vault is supported by three great unhewn pillars, formed of the same red rock as the grotto, and without shape. They are attached to the rock. The form of the grotto is almost circular. This is called the Grotto of the Agony, because it is supposed that in it our Saviour prayed a part of the time during His Agony. In the centre of the vault is a cleft, or opening, through which He might behold the sky during His prayer. Formerly the floor was nearly on a level with the ground outside. Now you descend into it by seven or eight steps rudely cut. Such is the place where our Lord, by anticipation, tasted in His soul the sorrows of death and the pains due to sin. Here, according to the expression of the Apostles, "He offered up prayers with a strong cry and tears, and being in an agony, His sweat was as great drops of blood falling down to the ground."

This garden, which was formerly separated from the mountain by a raised mound of earth, is now fenced by a low wall of uncemented stones. It is in the care of the Franciscan Fathers of the Holy Land. Close by the entrance is shown the place where, on a rock, the three Apostles were left by our Lord to pray, but fell asleep. The entrance to the garden is by an avenue about two yards wide, and fifteen to twenty long, between two low walls. It is called the Osculum, or kiss, because here Judas by a kiss betrayed the Saviour of the world.

It was towards eleven o'clock of the night of that eventful day that Judas issued forth from Jerusalem, and the tramp of his armed band broke the still calm of the valley of the Cedron. The red glare of their torchlight mingled strangely with the white moonlight, as they hastened along on the pathway that led to the Garden of Olives. Our Lord knew of their approach. It was not with the eyes of His Body that He perceived them, but by that knowledge by which He knows all things. He collected His disciples, giving them some few last words of comfort, and telling them that the traitor was now near. They came, and, after first showing them their powerlessness against Him, He gave Himself into their hands.

They led Him roughly over the brook Cedron, and through what is called the Dung Gate, to the west of Jerusalem, opposite to the suburb of Siloa, entered the city, and took Him to the house of Annas, which stood near David's Gate, almost at the foot of Mount Sion. It is now converted into an Armenian Monastery. The Monks show you in a court a large old olive tree, to which it is said our Saviour was bound till Annas should be ready for His trial. In the house of Annas He received the blow from a servant of the high priest. A lamp is now kept burning on the site of this outrage. Here also Peter denied our Lord for the first time. The house of Caiaphas stood also on Mount Sion. The Greeks have now a Monastery on the spot. Here is shown the court where Peter warmed himself at the fire,

and denied his Lord a second and a third time. Here also is to be seen a small cell, or dungeon, about three feet square, where it is said our Lord was confined a part of the night when His guards were weary of tormenting Him. The altar of the Church of this Monastery is formed out of the stone which closed the entrance to the Holy Sepulchre. Mount Sion is very near to the Dung Gate, through which the refuse of Jerusalem was carried to the valley of Hinnon. It was probably on account of its proximity to the house of Annas and Caiaphas that the Pharisees chose to conduct our Lord by this way ; for, had they come into Jerusalem by the ordinary road, they would have had to go through many streets before reaching their destination, and a tumult might have been excited, a thing they much feared.

The judgment of Caiaphas was in the early morn, and before daybreak on Friday, the 3rd of April. Jesus, after having been condemned for blasphemy, because He owned Himself to be the Son of God, was hurried away to the Prætorium of Pilate. This palace was close by the temple. The existing buildings are now occupied by the Turkish governor. There is still to be seen the porch of red marble which served for the entrance. It is walled up, but its colour renders it perfectly distinguishable. The staircase of twenty-eight marble steps has been removed to Rome, where it is held in great veneration under the name of the *Scala sancta*, or Holy Stairs. The Prætorium is a full mile from the house of Caiaphas.

The palace of Herod was about a hundred yards distant

from that of Pilate. No traces of it now remain, unless a few ruined walls. A few houses inhabited by Turks now occupy its place. When our Lord had refused to work a miracle to please Herod, He was sent back by him with disgrace to Pilate. Pilate determined to scourge Him severely, hoping thus to satisfy the rage of His enemies. The Hall of Scourging is seven or eight square yards in size. The pillar at which our Lord was scourged stood in the centre, and probably supported the vault, as, in S. Jerome's time, it sustained the porch of the Church of Mount Sion, being still stained with blood. A part is now kept in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and is only shown on Good Friday.

All Pilate's efforts to have our Lord set free having proved ineffectual, he, after having pronounced Him innocent, condemned Him to die. His last effort was to show Him to the people, with the words, "Behold the Man," after He had been scourged. The Arcade, where this presentation took place, was formerly part of a spacious porch, overlooking the main street. In this balcony the Roman governor might be seen and heard as he addressed himself to the multitude. Seeing that he prevailed nothing, he washed his hands before the multitude, and gave sentence of death. This place was called in Hebrew Gabbatha, because paved either with stones or marble.

Our Lord being condemned, descended the stairs of the palace, now called the *Scala sancta*, and so venerated

that even the Pope, when he ascends them, does so on his knees. The Gabbatha, now concealed in the Palace, is the first station of the cross. The second is about twenty paces onwards from where the stairs stood. Here it is said our Lord was given up to the will of His enemies, that is, they were allowed to wreak on Him all their fury. To reach the third station you pass under the Arcade of the *Ecce Homo*. There a prostrate marble column marks the spot where Jesus fell for the first time. Forty paces further, and you come to the place where tradition says, at the corner of a street, Mary waited to see her Son, accompanied by S. John. Oh, how the glances of the mother and the Son wounded mutually those hearts which loved each other so tenderly! This is the fourth station. The fifth is where Simon of Cyrene, coming through the Gate of Damascus, was laid hold of, and compelled to help our Lord to bear the cross, He being utterly unable for the task. The cross was about fifteen feet long, and the transverse beam eight feet. The weight of this burden He could not support, and was like to die on the road, through its oppression. This station is sixty paces further on. Eighty paces further you come to the place where the house of Veronica stood. She was spinning when she heard the tumult, and rose to look out at the door, when she caught a sight of our Lord's face—He sent forth a ray of light from His divine countenance; and illumined her soul by faith, to behold in Him the Son of the Most High. She takes her veil, and suddenly pierces through the

soldiers that surround Him, presenting it to His Face. Our Lord graciously received it, and, as a reward for her act of faith, left the image of His face imprinted on the folds of the veil.

About a hundred paces onward, you come to the Judgment Gate. On a stone pillar was here fixed the sentence of condemnation, that all might know for what crime they were punished. Here the sentence of our Lord was posted up by Pilate. The Gate is walled up half its height, but the pillar, which is upright, may be seen from a distance. At the seventh station, about eighty paces further on, Jesus fell for the second time. The place is marked by an incision in the wall. The eighth station is thirty fathoms from the seventh. It may be known by a thick column placed before a doorway of mean appearance, which is walled up. Here it was that our Lord turned to look at the weeping women, and begged them not to weep for Him, but rather for the things that should soon befall themselves and their children. By this He warned them of the severe judgments that are prepared by God for those who are impenitent in their sins.

From the Judgment Gate to Calvary the ground rises, and the ascent becomes steeper. The road by which our Lord went from the eighth station to Calvary is now covered with houses, amidst which is the ninth station, marked by a column. The Turks, in order to hinder Christians from their veneration of this place, heap filth around it. To visit Calvary the pilgrim has

to go by a new road. The tenth and last four stations are within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The tenth is where he was stripped of His garments; the eleventh He was nailed to the Cross; the twelfth He expired on the cross; the thirteenth He was taken down from the cross; and the fourteenth was laid in the sepulchre.

In these stations the pilgrim is shown the place where our Lord was crucified. There is built on it a chapel within the Church twenty-four feet square. The ascent to it is by twenty-one steps, more steep than those commonly used in houses. Here is shown the place where S. John and the most Holy Virgin stood with the two other Maries. The cross of the good thief stood four feet and a half from that of our Lord, and that of the bad thief six feet. Here is shown the miraculous cleft of the rock of Calvary. This cleft, contrary to the ordinary course of nature, has rent the rock, not with the grain, but against the grain, a thing quite unusual. This rent placed a chasm betwixt our Lord and the bad thief, it being within a foot of the hole in which his cross was fixed, so mysteriously separating him from the Saviour of the world. The three crosses were not in a line, but formed, so to speak, a triangle, so that our Lord could see the two thieves. The place where our Lord was crucified is now covered by an altar, under which the pilgrim stoops to kiss the spot. Two round black stones mark the places where the thieves were crucified. The Lord was crucified with His face

to the west, and His back to Jerusalem. Calvary lies to the north-west of Jerusalem. It was called in the Hebrew Golgotha, which means the place of a skull. There was before Christ a tradition that the skull of the first Adam was buried there. Calvary is only the Latin name of a skull, *i.e. calvaria*.

On descending from the platform, over the place where our Lord was crucified, you come to the Stone of Unction, which is near the entrance door. On this the Body of our Lord was anointed with myrrh and aloes, before being placed in the tomb. It is about eight feet in length and two feet broad. It is encased in marble, because pilgrims used sometimes to break pieces off. Ten lamps continually burn before it. About seventy yards from this is the Holy Sepulchre itself. It is like a little room, seven feet square and eight in height. The door is so low that one is obliged to stoop in entering. There is an elevated place cut in the rock in the form of an altar, on which was laid our dear Saviour's Body. In order to make it possible to enclose this Sepulchre in the Church some of the rock was cut away. The table and all the Sepulchre is now encased with marble for fear of injury. Forty-three silver lamps burn here day and night, and one of gold, adorned with costly gems, fulfilling the words of the prophet, "His sepulchre shall be glorious."

XII.

The Weeping Women.

"There followed Him a great multitude of people, and of women, who bewailed and lamented Him."

A DAY like Good Friday is hardly a day for many words: weeping, not speaking, should be our fitting employment. When the women followed our Lord to Calvary, we are not told of the words they uttered, but of the tears they let fall. A great grief takes refuge in silence. When Elias was to be taken up into heaven and the sons of the prophets said to Eliseus, "Knowest thou not that this day the Lord will take thy master from thee?" he answered them, "I also know it, hold ye your peace:" he could not bear to hear his great misfortune spoken of. When Job's friends had come from such a distance to comfort him for the loss of his children and of his substance, we read that for seven days and nights they sat with him on the ground, and no man spoke to him a word, for they saw that his grief was great. And how much more unfitting is a torrent of words when we are lamenting Christ the Lord, taken in our sins, put to death, and crucified. If words must be spoken they should be such words as may help us to weep—words which, like a key, may unlock the floodgates of our souls and cause the waters to flow abundantly, in bewailing our iniquities, which have brought this tragedy about.

Can any one wonder at the weeping of these women when the Saviour of the world, the Son of God, is seen walking barefoot, bruised and bleeding, on the road to Calvary. Yet His compassion for others seems to increase in proportion to the multiplication of His own sorrows. To His disciples in the garden He said, "Sleep on now, and take your rest;" to the lamenting women He says, "Weep not for Me." When He is being nailed to the cross, He says, "Father, forgive them;" and on the cross, to the thief He says, "To-day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." It is the misfortune of others which moves His Heart while He forgets His own. It is their sorrows that take up all His attention. He did not raise His eyes to Pilate in the judgment hall. He did not plead for Himself, nor answer the words of the governor, who had power to crucify or to release Him. When He was taken before Herod He uttered not so much as one word; yet now, without being asked, He of Himself turned His Face to the daughters of Jerusalem and speaks kindly to their hearts. What the king and the governor could not obtain, when they asked for it, He gives to these women without any petition. It was because they were weeping. The women weep and He turns to them. Had it not been for the tears running over their cheeks He never would have spoken to them. His Face turned and looked because their faces were wet with tears. Hot tears flowed over their cheeks, and our Lord's compassion was moved. If we want the Face of Jesus to look at us this day, we must get amongst these

weeping women. Tears alone will attract His eye. He either looks at the weeping, or He looks to make men weep. For this it was that He turned and looked upon Peter, that His look might break up the fountain of Peter's tears.

These women who wept were not the nearest persons to Christ. They followed Him only at a distance. It would seem as if He went out of His way to look at them, or to address them. Perhaps we cannot follow Christ near. We are not strong enough to do great things for Him. Yet, if we follow Him weeping, though not so closely as many others, we may hope that His eye will be turned towards us, and that our tears will not escape His notice. We shall be dearer to Him by our weeping than if we followed Him ever so closely without tears. On all His road to Calvary the weeping women were the only ones Christ spoke to. He said nothing to Veronica, the holy woman who wiped His sacred Face with a napkin. He gave no words to His blessed Mother. But these women who followed Him, sharing His Passion with their lamentations, to these He spoke, upon these He cast His blessed eyes.

And where else could the Saviour of the world look? If He looked up, He saw the cross. If He looked down, He beheld the dirt and stones which were cast at Him. On the one side, there went the thieves who reviled Him; on the other, the executioners, who tormented. Whither then should He look? If He looked before Him, He saw the exulting men, who were His enemies, casting scorn in

His teeth ; so He looked behind on the face of the weeping women. It is mourners that are attractive in our Lord's eyes. Even natural sorrow draws compassion from His gentle Face. Times of sorrow draw Him nearer to us, but especially sorrow for sin. Then He lifts up the light of His countenance upon us, the sun's bright beams shining amidst the rain, to turn our heaviness into joy, and to wipe away our tears.

It is sorrow for sin that our Lord most wants. He desires this even more than tears of sympathy with His own sufferings. Into this channel He would turn our tears. "Weep not for Me, weep rather for yourselves." Weep not for the innocent, but weep for the guilty. Weep not for Him Whose Blood is shed, but for those on whom It will fall in doom. We should not weep for Abel, but for Cain ; not for innocent Joseph, but for his wicked brethren ; not for righteous David, but for cruel Saul. It is tyrants we should compassionate, not glorious Martyrs ; Jezebel, not Elias ; Manasses, not Isaias, who was sawn asunder. Weep for the wicked who live, not for the good who die. Weep not for the dead, for they are in peace ; but weep for the living, who flourish in wickedness. "For if these things are done in a green tree, what shall be done in a dry?"

A day of tears ought this day to be—of tears for our Lord's sufferings, and of tears for our own sins. Nothing is more lovely to the eyes of God and the Angels than the sight of faces bedewed with tears of contrition. Women of the world seek for pearls and diamonds to

set off their beauty with greater lustre, but the friends of God adorn themselves with holy tears. These tears descend, yet ascend ; they dry up as they fall on the ground, and yet are preserved in God's treasury in heaven. They are silent, yet they cry aloud. "Give ear," says David, "to my tears ;" and again, "The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping." These tears does our Lord ask of us as a tribute of homage to His Passion.

Now let us approach and kiss His sacred Feet. Was ever sight more moving to the heart than this? Behold the Saviour of mankind lying nailed on the tree of scorn. See how the cruel nails have torn their way through His most tender Hands and Feet. O God, what pain, what anguish did He not suffer there ! His pallid Brow is marked with wounds of His crown of thorns, His Hair all drenched with Blood. His Head is bowed as when He gave up the ghost. See how the envious spear opened a road to His Heart. The water comes out, and then the Blood, the water as a fountain of tears, and the Blood to cleanse our sins away. Here in this Sacred Heart we must make our home. Here is a sure hiding-place from the wrath of an angry God. Come, then, let us with our kisses wipe away each mark of hate and scorn ; and as we stoop down to kiss, let us drop a tear on His wounded Feet. But if our eyes be dry, let our hearts at least feel sad, and mazed, and all unstrung, at such a dreadful sight.

Oh, my heart, if now thou art not sad, what is there that will touch thee ? My crucified Jesus, break Thou my heart, my stony heart, that, a fountain of tears flow-

ing out, I may worthily weep over my own sins and Thy sorrows !

Draw near, ye mourning women ;
Ye Maries three, draw nigh,
And hold the spotless linen sheet
Firmly, yet tenderly.

Have ye the water ready
To wash away each stain ;
Oh ! gently cleanse the Blood away,
Though now He feel no pain.

And very gently from His Brow
Draw out each piercing thorn ;
And wipe from off His pallid cheek
Each mark of hate and scorn.

Nay ! holy Mother Mary,
Do not thou longer mourn ;
His agony is over now,
He heeds nor nail nor thorn.

Now cross His chill and piercèd Hands
Upon His quiet Breast,
That they may on His Holy Wound
And Sacred Heart find rest.

And thou, oh ! mourning Magdalene
Shalt wash with tears once more
Those suffering and weary Feet,
As thou hast done before.

But now with finest linen cloth,
Most soft and spotless white,
Dry thou the Tears and Blood away,
With tenderest touch and light.

Draw nearer, stricken Mother,
Arrange His tangled Hair,
As in His childhood thou wert wont
With all a mother's care.

Nay, nay, ye must not linger,
Now that your task is done ;
Ye anguish'd mourning women,
The night wears swiftly on.

Hear ye ! They come to wrap Him
All in the winding-sheet ;
And lay Him in the garden tomb
With love and awe most meet.

Now all is over—in the tomb
He lieth very still ;
His weary work is ended all,
And done His Father's Will.

Poor Maries, cease your weeping ;
Say, trust ye not His word,
That He on the third day will rise,
And prove Himself the Lord ?

Alas ! ye reckon not, mourners,
Ye only know He lies
All shrouded in the sepulchre
And hidden from your eyes.

Sit ye beside that sepulchre
And watch far in the night ;
And bring the spices and the myrrh
Before the morning light.

Ye wist not that He ne'er will need
Your loving care again—
Jesus is risen from the tomb,
The Roman's seal is vain.

* * * * *

Oh ! sweetest, tenderest pity,
Oh ! thoughtful love, and true,
That He should give His holy Corpse
To be laid out by you.

Oh ! most deep Love, amazing
In its intensity !—
Dear Holy Jesus, give us power
To wait and watch for Thee.

But not for us to handle,
Nor dare we draw so near ;
We watch Thee at a distance, Lord,
With awe and loving fear.

Oh ! grant to me, sweet Jesus,
One day to kiss Thy Feet ;
To feel Thy dear Hands on my head,
In benediction sweet.

Grant us, who watch Thee dying,
So to behold Thee rise ;
And when our pilgrimage is o'er,
To see Thee with our eyes.

But to behold Thee e'en far off,
My Jesus, is such bliss ;
I dare not trust my mind to paint
The raptures of Thy kiss.



GLORIOUS MYSTERIES.

XIII.

White and Ruddy.

"My Beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands."

IN these days of Eastertide the Beloved of our souls shines all the more clearly from the gloom of His Passion, through which we have lately passed, and it was so eminently with the Apostles at His Resurrection.

Aforetime they had believed in Him, and had loved Him, yet His great beauty had been but dimly described; now its light shone firm and clear. His Passion, which had seemingly been about to overwhelm all, when His visage became marred and inglorious, and His form without beauty or comeliness, had suddenly become the mirror, in which should appear, with enhanced excellence, all that they had before admired,—all that had so won their hearts, as to prevail on them to give up everything, wives and home, and substance, for the exceeding

great good of the sweetness of His beloved company. The cry of their souls, seeking Jesus Who withdraws Himself, was at this time, "My Beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands."

As man is the masterpiece of creation, so also is the beauty of his face the most beautiful part of man. It is that admirable mixture of the white and the red in the countenance of man, which God alone can paint, that is here put forth by the Spouse as the figure of the exceeding beauty of her Beloved, "My Beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands."

2. Jesus Christ is the Beloved. The whiteness is the glory of the Godhead, Light of light, dwelling in light inaccessible, Whom no man hath seen nor can see. The red is the human nature which was drawn from that Adam, who was so named as made of the red clay of the ground. Just as in the face of man it is the inimitable minglement of the white and red, which gives it its ravishing charm, so the Godhead and the manhood, joined together in the one person of Jesus for love of us, steals away our hearts in the wonders of their contemplation.

He says of Himself, "Before Abraham was I am;" and yet it is with equal truth affirmed by others, "Is not His Mother called Mary?" He is said to be "over all, God blessed for ever;" and yet with equal certainty that He was found in fashion as a man. Almost at one and the same time we see the weakness of the manhood, and the power of the Godhead. Behold He lies asleep

on a pillow, He is then very man subject to human infirmities; but lo! He rises and rebukes the winds and the waters, and they obey Him.

What manner of man is this?

This is not man, but God. His weakness as man we see when, being weary, He sat on the well. The omniscience of God we behold when, shortly afterwards, it is said of Him, "He told me all things that ever I did."

He is one with feelings like ourselves. "*Jesus wept.*" Yet a man that has been four days dead He wakes out of the sleep of corruption.

"What is thy Beloved more than another beloved, say the daughters of Jerusalem, that thou dost so adjure us?" And well does the Spouse reply at once, "My Beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands." As much as to say, "There is no beloved like my Beloved, Who unites in one person the glories of the Godhead, and the lowliness of the manhood. Far above the beauty of those thousands that stand before the throne of God does His radiance shine clear. That He is God and yet man, man and yet God, this is the inexplicable charm and secret of His beauty. Such is my Beloved, and He is my Friend."

3. The meeting of the Godhead and the manhood are not the only contrasted and mingled red and white in the person of Jesus Christ. They are the greatest, for what can be so admirable as to see the Lord of heaven humbled to the form of a servant; to see the incommuni-

cable Name bestowed on created nature? But there are lower degrees of beauty also to be found, worthy still of attention, where the white and the red show out against one another. For the white may stand for the fairness of man's simple natural life, and the redness for suffering and the shedding of blood.

Then how white was Jesus Christ, when His Mother first looked in His fair Face, as she laid Him, wrapped in swaddling clothes, in the manger at Bethlehem. But, oh, how red in the garden of Gethsemani, in His Agony, when His sweat became as great drops of Blood falling down to the ground! How white were those little Hands when as an Infant He played with Mary's hair; but oh, how red when gored with the transfixing nails on the cross! How white was that Brow which Simeon gazed at with rapture and delight; but oh, how red when crowned with thorns and bruised with blows! He was white when let alone as the carpenter's Son, red when led off to prison and to death; white when in honour, as on Palm-Sunday, but red in the procession of the Cross; white when He followed a peaceful life in His village home at Nazareth, though winning His bread with hard toil, but red when scourged for us at the pillar by the furious soldiers of Pilate. "My Beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands."

Even His bodily sufferings were such as none other ever experienced: of the thousands of martyrs who have endured such terrible things for His Name, never did any one suffer as He did. He, the Captain of their salvation,

in bringing many sons to glory, suffered more than they all put together. The complexion of that body, formed of virginal flesh by the Holy Ghost Himself, was so exquisitively made, as to be capable of appreciating either delight or pain infinitely more than that of any ordinary man. All its susceptibilities were so delicate, so refined, that each of His torments affected Him a thousand-fold more sensibly than they would do any ordinary man. As far as outward semblances go, many may have endured as much or more than He; but either on account of the grossness of their sensibilities, or the graces by which they were upheld, these torments did not cause in them that excruciating anguish which they made Him to suffer.

4. But again He is white and ruddy in another way, white through His innocence, and ruddy from the shame of the guilt charged upon Him, as it is written, "For thy sake have I suffered reproof, shame hath covered My Face." If you would see the lustre of His whiteness, hear what Pilate says of Him: "I find no fault in Him." If, however, you wish to see His ruddy hue, hear what is answered: "If He were not a malefactor we would not have delivered Him unto thee." Would you behold His whiteness, listen to what He Himself says: "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" But if you desire to know how red is His wickedness, hearken to the sentence—they all adjudged Him to be guilty of death. The red and the white are intermingled, and enhance His beauty. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners;

yet He was numbered with the transgressors. One, to prove how good He was, said, "We know that God heareth not sinners;" but others say, "Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." "In Him," says S. John, "was no sin;" and yet for His guiltiness it is said, "Behold how many things these witness against Thee." In His innocence how great was His beauty: He was fairer than the children of man. In the redness of His guilt He was despised and most abject of men, because God had made Him to be sin for us Who knew no sin. None were so innocent as He, none so guilty, for the Lord had laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Such is our Beloved, and such is our Friend, "white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands."

There may be many other ways in which the white and the red interpenetrate each other in Him, but if there were no other these would be enough to draw the hearts of all that should gaze on them to the love of Him. It is not His innocence alone that renders Him beautiful, but the guilt which is attributed to Him much enhances His beauty, as the lustre of white shows more lustrous off a dark ground. His Passion is exceeding ruddy, but the pain and the torment show more red when contrasted with those seasons of simple ordinary life, before the days of His Agony had arrived.

The glory of His Godhead shines white indeed, with a whiteness no fuller on earth can whiten, but its splendour shines yet the brighter by the mixture of the con-

sideration of the decease He is to accomplish at Jerusalem. In all these points our Beloved far exceeds any other beloved: "He is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands." There is no doubt that even for natural beauty Jesus Christ far excelled all the rest of men. Beauty of any sort constrains the love of the heart. But His beauty of form and the graciousness of His demeanour were not the chief things in Him which drew on Him the love of those with whom He consorted. They had their part, but the principal beauties were those higher ones and more sublime before mentioned. It was the contemplation of these that ravished the hearts of Peter and the rest of the Apostles, whose eyes were opened by faith to behold them.

Oh, how passionately did they love Him! and they thought it nothing for this love of Him to have gone to prison and to death. They were grieved and felt wronged that He should doubt their willingness. Nor did He doubt it, for they were indeed willing, had He upheld their faith strong and firm. But for the purpose of His own secret counsel He allowed their faith to be shaken, and then His beauty was gone from their sight with their clouded faith. But how soon He could wake all up again if He willed. He had but to turn His glance upon Peter, and with that glance faith revived, and all the old love came back. That glance of His love had pierced Peter to the quick. Peter felt he had wounded His love.

He could not bear himself for the thought of his strange heartlessness. The floodgates of the deep were

broken up. He went out in bitter tears, He cared not now for the scorn of men or for the peril of His life ; the glance of Him Whom he loved, the white and ruddy, filled his vision, and there was left no room for aught else. As he wept out in the dark night the look of that Face was still mirrored vividly on the waters of his soul, and he could have died willingly to blot out what he had been betrayed into. He could have died of very shame and grief for being false to his love.

Ever since that time the same mysterious form of God-made-man has been moving about the earth, and the world has gone wondering after Him, lured by the fascination of His beauty, and kissing the very footsteps which His feet have printed. Men have become as it were sottish and foolish for excess of His love. The rich man forgot his wealth, and the ambitious his honours, and the comfortable man his ease to go after Him. He has turned the world upside down with His love, and the bridegroom left his bride, and the bride her bridegroom.

Prudence has gone from the wise when He is in the case. We have seen the most unlikely persons carried away by His strange influence, doing things and leading lives clean contrary to the bent of their natural dispositions. Perhaps even we ourselves, some of us, have become the victims, happy victims, of this blessed infatuation. And when we are asked a reason for our conduct—"What is thy Beloved above another beloved?"—we cannot give a reply that will be understood by others; but

we can give one which, in its deep and varied sense, quite satisfies our own hearts as they melt away with unutterable emotion: and the reply is, "My Beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands."

XIV.

The Promised Return.

"I go away, and I come again to you."

THE last few weeks before the Feast of the Ascension, the Church would have us occupy our minds with the ultimate withdrawal of our Lord from the earth, and the substitution in His room of a new and more excellent Presence of the Holy Ghost. Our Lord broke the intelligence of His leaving them to His disciples towards the beginning of the last year of His ministry, telling them at the same time of the violent death He should die. S. Matthew marks the precise period when He began to treat plainly with them upon this painful subject. It was after His Transfiguration. His former intimations on the matter had been but dark and obscure; now His speech was distinct and clear. S. Mark, however, tells us that though He spoke in such distinct terms, yet they understood not the word, and they were afraid to ask Him. Just before His Passion, however, He spoke to them in such an unmistakable manner of His leaving the world and re-

turning to His Father, that they could no longer doubt as to His meaning, and they confessed that He now spoke no proverb. There was now no obscurity in His utterance. The consequence was that they were filled with the deepest sorrow at the heavy tidings.

We cannot wonder at this. How could it fall out otherwise? We are told on one occasion that the rulers sent ministers to apprehend Him. These men, coming with this purpose, were utterly disarmed by listening awhile to the words of grace that came forth from His mouth. They felt they could not dare to do that for which they were come, and they returned with their mission unaccomplished. Thus ruthless wolves were changed into lambs; and if such was the effect of His Presence upon His enemies, that in so short a time, and, as it were, at a distance from Him, they were so marvelously influenced, of how much more overpowering a nature was that charm with which the dew of His speech distilled upon other hearers? Their eyes were ravished with the sound of His words, and the sweet majesty of His face so haunted the hearts of penitent sinners, that it made them hate themselves at the thought of One so holy and so pure. The twelve Apostles, however, were a class apart, brought into a still closer bond with Him by the endearments of His familiarity. To them He says, "I have not called you servants, but I have called you friends." To them He pours out His Heart and makes known His secret thoughts, His distresses and His joys. They on their part make known to Him their joys and

anxieties. He cares for their bodily wants, coming to their assistance by His miraculous power, when they had laboured all night in fishing and had taken nothing, or when they toiled in rowing against contrary winds. Or, again, in a natural manner, as when He said to them, "Come apart into a desert place, and rest awhile," for there were so many coming and going that they had not so much as time to rest. They on their part were thoughtful for Him, as when they pressed Him at the well of Sichar, saying, "Master, eat," for they knew that He must be hungry. Or, again, when they would not disturb Him as He lay asleep on a pillow in the hinder part of the ship, until they were absolutely in jeopardy of perishing. Who can tell the numberless little offices of kindness which passed, during these three years, between the Master and His disciples. The sop, which as a token of love our Lord gave to Judas at the Last Supper was not the first manifestation of affection towards him, but one of His frequent acts. So when Judas came to give a kiss to our Lord, this was no unusual thing, but an endearment to which the traitor was accustomed, when his heart was as yet right with His Lord.

As He loved His own to the end, so likewise did they love Him. They loved Him with an impassioned love. They loved Him better than their own lives. When Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him,"—when they all said they were ready with Peter to go with Him to prison and to death, this was no idle enthusiastic speech. They were willing and eager, every

one of them, to shed their last drop of blood in His behalf. Had our Lord at the moment He was apprehended in the garden, had He but given a word of encouragement, had He with His voice and eye called upon their love to fight for their Master, there was not one of them that would not have willingly sacrificed his life in the attempt to rescue Him from the hands of His foes. But when He forbade them to lift the sword, when they saw Him give Himself up into the hands of them that hated Him, they were so utterly disheartened and panic-stricken, never having looked forward to such an issue, that they all forsook Him and fled. It was the hour of the powers of darkness. They had looked but for human difficulties, and they found themselves unequally matched, wrestling with the spirits of wickedness, and so they fell, miscalculating their strength. Had the Lord helped them they would have stood firm; but He left them to themselves, that they might see that without Him they could do nothing. But He had only to turn and look on Peter, and one look had kindled again the old flame in fullest vigour, for when Peter denied Him with his mouth, he still held Him fast in his heart. So likewise did they all, but this love, too natural, was not enough, however strong, without the touch of and influx of grace.

It was no love of word and of tongue which they had for Him, but one in deed and in truth. They had given up their all for Him. "Behold, we have left all and have followed Thee." Besides worldly goods, they had

given up parents and brethren, wife and children, for His sake. What an enthralling love was that that could induce them to make such sacrifices. It was no common affection that manifested itself in such fruits. To buy this pearl of great price they had had to sell all that they had. But they counted the loss of all things as nothing, if only by such loss they could gain Him. They grudged nothing if only they could secure Him. This they seemed to have done. And while, with hearts tingling with love, they were wondering at their own blessedness, whilst they were drinking deep draughts from this intoxicating cup of pleasure,—oh, what pain and anguish! could it be true that He was going to leave them? When He first broke the news to them they would not believe Him, still less that He should die a violent death. This be far from Thee, they thought. Yet they felt a strange sinking of heart, an amazed dread that they were unable to account for, a sort of presentiment of coming sorrow, though the thundercloud was not yet in sight. “And being in the way going up to Jerusalem, He went before them, and they were astonished, and as they followed they were afraid.” In such words the Evangelist signifies the bewildered feeling of sadness and fear that took possession of them—the foreboding token of coming woes.

But when the time of His offering was close at hand our Lord spoke in clearer and still more distinct terms. He told them that He had come forth from the Father, and had come into the world, and that now He was

about to leave the world and return to the Father. But that they might not be utterly overwhelmed with sorrow for His loss, He told them He would send them another Comforter who should remain with them for ever. This, however, He knew would not satisfy them, for what they wanted was Himself, not another. For this reason He added that this Comforter should not speak of Himself, but should bring all things to their remembrance whatever He had told them: "He shall glorify Me," He said, "for He shall take of Mine and shall show it unto you." But because even this was not enough to solace their aching hearts, He goes on further to promise them that, though the world should see Him no more, they, His chosen ones, should still see Him. "I go away," it is true, "but I come again. Ye shall see Me again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take away from you."

Such was the way in which our Lord softened the ruggedness of His departure to the sorrowing minds of His disciples. He found Himself tight-locked in their embrace. Firmly, but most tenderly, He loosed from around Him the arms that held Him fast imprisoned. It was more pain to Him to have to do so than for them to suffer it. This it is that gives such exquisite pathos to His last discourse. But He must teach them the lesson, and they, with saddened but resigned hearts, must take it home: "Yea, though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer." Their love, too natural, must be spiritualised. The earth must

drop away, and there must remain only what was of heaven.

This discipline of the purification of the love of His disciples our Lord carried on to a still further degree after His Resurrection. Had he pleased He might have consorted continually with them all those forty days He yet remained on the earth. Instead of this, we find that He was very sparing of His appearances to them, and when He did appear He seems to have stayed with them no very great length of time. They never knew when He might appear, or how soon He might vanish when He did appear. He was, as it were, yet with them, and yet not with them. They might always fancy that He was with them unseen, and any moment become visible. When He had vanished from their sight they knew not that He was gone from their presence, nay, they must have felt that He was never far away.

This kind of Presence of our Lord with His disciples prepared them for that Presence which was given at Pentecost by His Spirit. "The Spirit," says S. John, "was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." The graces of the Holy Ghost had been in the world ever since the creation of man. They continued with him in a measure after his fall. But by the Incarnation an abiding change had taken place in the relations between God and man. At the day of Pentecost was inaugurated a new order of the gifts of the Spirit consequent upon those changed relations. God by them was brought nearer to man, and man nearer to God. The whole view

of the things of the human race was an altered one. Formerly the Word, by Whom all things were made, looked upon men as His creatures; now He saw in them His own brothers. They were not only His brothers as partakers of the same human nature as His own, drawn from the stock of Adam, but by a closer bond still. For by the new gifts of the Spirit He made them sharers of that regenerated and exalted human nature, which He had first sanctified in Himself, by union with His divine person, making it a source of new life to all those who should receive of it through His Spirit. Thus He knit men to Himself as very members of His Body, His flesh, and His bones. He dwelt in them and walked in them, and the life they lived was but the extension and continuation of His own life, they being made by this unspeakable gift partakers of the divine nature.

When, therefore, our Lord promises to His disciples that He will come again to them; that He is with them all days even to the end of the world; that where two or three are gathered together in His Name, He is in the midst of them, this must indicate more than His Presence as God; it must imply in some way, inconceivable, perhaps, to us, His Presence as God-man. Apart therefore from His sacramental Presence, there is another Presence also of our Lord as God-man with His chosen ones, a Presence which is continual, ever abiding—a Presence to which we may appeal at all moments. He is within us and around us. In the days of His earthly

pilgrimage He spoke of Himself as man being then in heaven—the Son of man Who is in heaven ; not that His human nature was actually in the heavens, but that the Word bearing that human nature was at that very time in heaven. In the same manner now, though His human nature has been exalted above all heavens, yet, on account of its indissoluble union with the Person of the Word, Who as God is everywhere, He brings this human nature into relationship with us on earth by His Spirit. He is in the midst of us, He as God, but sustaining in the same personality a human nature, which ever influences Him in His beholding of us. This human nature is knit so closely to His Godhead, that it enters into its treasures and partakes of them, is carried along with it, so to speak, everywhere.

O sweetest and most comfortable word : “ I go away, and I come again to you.” My Jesus ! if Thou hadst never gone away, but hadst remained in Thy natural Presence on the earth, Thou wouldst have been but in one place of all the kingdoms of this world. But now Thou art gone away and come again to us, Thou art present by Thy Spirit everywhere in the hearts of Thy faithful, who love Thee and keep Thy commandments. There Thou bindest Thyself intimately with them, supporting them in sorrow, carrying them forward to good, and refraining them from evil. At all times and in all places Thou remainest with them all day and all night, so that they need not seek Thee. I thank Thee, Lord, for this unspeakable gift. Abide with me, O Lord, and

draw me yet closer into Thy excellent embrace, that, as Thou hast been so gracious as to come to me, I may lose myself altogether in Thee.

XV.

The Ascension.

"Father, glorify Thou Me, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was."

ON this day of the Ascension this prayer of our Lord's was fulfilled, and He went up on high to enjoy that glory which He had with the Father before the world was. The words of the prayer suggest three ideas connected with this mystery of the Ascension, namely, the life our Lord had with the Father before His Advent into this world; the life He lived when on earth; and, lastly, the life He was received to on His Ascension into heaven. These three phases, in their triple contrast, are a suitable study for our souls on this day.

And first the life our Lord had with His Father which He speaks of as one of glory. O how blessed, how transcendently happy was that life—a life of unalterable, purest, and passionless joy, never lessened, never impaired; an unfading bliss ever at its climax, never higher, never lower, but always full and complete. In that life He enjoyed a clear serenity, without a shade of trouble or annoyance of any kind. No cloud or mist ever

dimmed the brightness of its sun even for a moment. Compared with this joy, all other joy is not joy, but sorrow ; all other happiness, trouble and pain.

This life of supreme happiness was the life of God Himself, the very same life as the life of the Father. If we would search out its beginning, we cannot find it. If we were to travel fast as, or faster than, the waves of light, as they continually pour forth their brilliancy from the sun, swifter than thought, yet never should we reach the commencement of those eternal years. We should still be as far off from it as ever, for His life had no beginning, His sun saw no rising. Never was God without His Word. Never was there an Eternal Father without His co-equal Son. In that life no such thing as succession has any existence. There is no beginning of days, nor end of years. There is no long or short, but one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The past, the present, and the future, are all one. In this life the most opposite conditions found their place in an unutterable manner—an activity without turmoil ; and, without idleness, a calm and still repose. This was the life of the Word from all eternity, surrounded by the rays of His great majesty, dwelling in His own inaccessible light.

When the Word of God brought creation into being ; when He filled the empyreal heavens with the angelic host, and formed the vast universe with its sentient life, was it that He needed them for the consummate perfection of His bliss ? Was it that He fell short in any

point? By no means. It was only that His creatures might in their several degrees be admitted to a share of His treasures, having in Him what they cannot have in themselves. As the crystal drinks in the light, so at creation the light of God was poured out, and the Angels filled themselves with its intelligence. As the sponge steeps itself in the perfume with which it is overflowed, so the vast universe carries about with it the fragrance of its Creator's wisdom and power. The creation of the world, with its system of stars and constellations at such immense distances from each other, displayed this wisdom and power. But neither their creation, nor that of the angelic intelligences, added anything to the essential beatitude of His life, which was alike incapable of increase or diminution. For it is of the very nature of the Godhead that it is self-sufficing. God needs nothing outside of Himself.

2. But when the fulness of time came, the Son of God left the throne of His majesty. The Word of God came down from heaven to visit the world which He had made, and to take part in it. He laid aside the garments of His glory, and clothed Himself in the weeds of our poor mortality: He became Man. But how did God descend from heaven, God Who is everywhere, and cannot shift from place to place? For God is above all things, and below all things. He surrounds all things, and is within all things. He is within, not as contained; He surrounds, not as extended beyond. A larger space does not contain more of Him, nor a

smaller space less ; but in an ineffable manner He is everywhere whole and entire and undivided, without reference to space. There can be no local movement therefore with Him. The Son of God descended not by coming down from some more elevated region, but by humbling His Divine Person to take the lowly nature of man. He stooped down by the marvellous condescensions of His compassion, shrouding the grandeurs of His Godhead under a form of clay. Oh how great, how stupendous was this abasement ! What an exchange He had to make in submitting Himself to this humiliation ! Instead of a life of joy and gladness, He now embraced one of pain and tears. Instead of glory and honour, behold now there is nothing but shame and contempt. Instead of having a fulness of all things, He finds Himself in the utmost want and necessity. Alas ! what a life to descend to for the great God of heaven. Instead of omnipotence we now see the feebleness of infancy. He Whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain is shackled with a fleshly nature. He Who is Lord of all becomes a Servant of others. But He goes down lower still. He has taken the likeness of sinful flesh, that flesh which has been disgraced by Adam, and He consents therefore to suffer in it as a criminal, though Himself all holy. Could He descend to a lower depth ? He can go no lower, so when He is on the verge of this last descending step, He makes the prayer, " Father, glorify Thou Me, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was."

3. The suffering and death of Christ were in the Divine plan a requisite preliminary to the glory that should follow. This truth is taught by our Lord in these words, "Ought not Christ to have suffered, and so to enter into His glory?" S. Paul also says, "We see Jesus for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour." And again, "Having joy set before Him, He endured the Cross, despising the shame, and so sitteth on the right hand of God." By a hidden Divine law, which we can read but not fathom, death seems ever the condition of rising to a more glorious life. The Son of God did not seek exemption from this rule. He came into this world beauteous with a halo of heaven-born grace. He goes out branded as a malefactor, gibbeted between two thieves, His limbs gashed and torn, His tear-stained face all dabbled with blood. He chose the lowest place, entering, like an outcast in a stable, closing, with the seal of public infamy, as a criminal on the cross. What a finale for the life of the Son of God on the earth. However, all is over now. The last dread act of this terrible tragedy has been played out. No more pain now, no more sorrow, no more distress and anguish of soul, for the former things are passed away. Three days quiet in the grave, a few more on the earth in His risen Body, and our Lord bids farewell to earth, to return whence He came.

The life of our Lord here below was after all only a sort of interlude between two eternities, an eternity of glory before and an eternity of glory after. Again

He is received into His Father's bosom. Again He sits on His Father's throne, not now as God only, but as God and man. When He ascended up on high He did so by a real local movement, the human nature which He had taken still remaining in the perfection of its natural substance. He takes it up on high that it may be admitted to the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. Having overcome, it is given to Him in this nature to sit on His Father's throne—that is, on the throne of the Godhead—that all men may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father: that as to His Father, so also to Him in His human nature, “every knee should bow of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.”

What a mighty change is this! What oil of joy for mourning, and a crown for ashes! Instead of a stable the heavenly palace, and instead of a cross the kingly throne! Instead of contempt, praise and adoration; and instead of pain and distress, everlasting gladness. Once “despised and most abject of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity, His look as it were hidden;” now ascending up on high with jubilation, leading captivity captive, and giving gifts to men. How strange the contrast! The dark ground of His earthly life setting off, with a yet sweeter lustre, the golden sheen of His life of glory. This glory of our Lord, as God and man, will last for ever and ever. As God He enlightens the heavenly city, and as the Lamb He is the Lamp thereof.

Shine on us here also, O Thou King of glory, and let one ray of Thy splendour pierce through the dark veil which hides Thee from our eyes. Thither would we come where Thou hast gone before. Keep our eyes ever looking upward to Thee, that so we may be satisfied when Thy glory shall appear.

XVI.

The Kiss of the Spirit.

"Let Him kiss me with the kiss of His mouth."

THESE are the opening words of the Cantic of canticles, which is the bridal song of Christ and His Church. They express the cry of this world, the cry of mankind before the grace of Redemption. By that kiss is meant the Pentecostal gift of the Holy Ghost. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Mouth of God. The two lips are His Godhead and His manhood, for the gift of Pentecost, which mankind so desired, is not any grace of the Holy Ghost in general, but the Holy Ghost as sent by the glorified Christ, God and man; the kiss to men of completed reconciliation and peace, the token of perfect love and atonement.

When man was first created, it is said that Jehovah breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. This breath of life was a gift of the Holy Ghost, by the reception of which Adam was elevated to a state above nature. To

his natural rational faculties, his intellectual and moral powers, there was added a light from God, clearing the understanding, and an energy giving strength to the will through the communion of his soul with the Godhead. Adam sinned, and he lost at once that communion which had exalted him to a state which his nature had no claim to ; and when he begat a son he begat him in *his own* likeness, not graced, as he himself had been at his first creation, with the breath of supernatural life, but only the inheritor of his bare natural faculties and the gift of reason. Human nature, at the moment of sin, sank to its own level ; and very soon, sin being added to sin, it sank below its own level, becoming degraded and corrupted exceedingly. Even where the tradition of the fall has become almost wholly obscured, and man has been left in the dark, he has still had within him a witness that he has fallen from some higher state, a blind consciousness unaccountably pressing on him of his wretched state—a strange dissatisfaction, the root of which he cannot comprehend, but whose presence he cannot choose but feel. Such has been man's inner experience, according to the testimony of all history.

It was the withdrawal of God's Holy Spirit that occasioned the misery of man, that he might learn by experience what a bitter thing it was to have forsaken his God. Not that God altogether abandoned man, whom He had made : He did not wholly desert him, but withdrew to some distance, visiting him less frequently, and with a lower measure of grace. The less they had of the graces

of the Spirit, the less men longed for their fulness. Yet even amidst the thickest darkness of the heathen world, the longings of a nature created for communion with a heaven could not altogether be repressed, and hope was breathed where all hope seemed gone, that the golden days would be at some future time restored. It was but a flickering light, yet it served to give testimony that all was not quite quenched. Amidst God's chosen people, however, the graces of the Spirit were greater and more frequent, and hope shone with a brighter, steadier glance. But even the most favoured of them, the prophets themselves, who were moved by the Spirit of Christ, and foretold the sufferings in Christ, and the glories that should follow; even they did but see the future fulness, and did not taste it. And it was revealed to them that not to themselves, but to us, they ministered, by their prophecies of those things which have been fulfilled to us, the Holy Ghost being sent down from heaven on Whom the angels desire to look. Even John the Baptist, who from his mother's womb was filled with the Holy Ghost, was not so greatly favoured as is the least in the kingdom of heaven by the gift of Pentecost. For this gift, both in kind and in degree, is lifted up far above all the graces of the Spirit ever before bestowed upon man; far above even that which Adam received when the Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. It excels the highest. Its preciousness is beyond that of all the rest put together. It alone is satisfying, and by itself can give content. For this

it is that the Spouse cries, when she says, "Let Him kiss me with the kiss of His mouth."

Before this gift of the Spirit was poured forth upon mankind generally, according to the prophecy of Joel, it existed first as the sole possession of the Man-God Jesus Christ. It was with this oil of gladness He was anointed above His fellows. For the Spirit was not given by measure to Him; but because in Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead, bodily and in a substantial manner, not by mere graces; therefore His man's nature also was filled with the plenitude of the Holy Ghost. He held, therefore, the primacy, and in Him all fulness dwelt; that it might be afterwards derived from Him to the rest of mankind. Whilst He was on earth He had none to share with Him this fulness. Others were not to receive the water of life from Him till His whole task was completed, and He had entered into His rest. The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

His desire to impart of His fulness to others made Him cry, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" He could show His disciples the way by His example, He could unfold the truth by His doctrine; but He was withheld from imparting to them the Spirit of life, through which alone they could be enabled to walk firmly in the way of His example, or follow and understand the truth of His teaching. It pleased the Father, in bringing many children to glory, to perfect the Author of their salvation by

HIS Passion. It was by His Passion He for their sakes sanctified Himself, that they might be sanctified through the truth, by a holiness derived from Him. "Unless a grain of wheat, falling into the ground, die, it remaineth alone ; but, if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." So it was necessary in the council of the Father that our Lord's human life should be dissolved by death, and taken again incorruptible, before others should be able to receive of His fulness. Only then should that renovated and exalted human nature, made divine by its union with the person of the Son of God, be made by the Spirit the source of regeneration to the rest of mankind. This, then, is the gift of Pentecost, the gift of that life which our Lord promised to bestow, when He said, "I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly." The life that Christians receive is an extension of Christ's own life, the renewed and elevated condition of man's nature, as existing in Him, made over by the Spirit to the rest of the human family. This life is not merely human, as in Adam, but participates in the treasures of His Godhead, so that, to as many as receive Him, to them He gives power to become the sons of God, and they are thus made partakers of the divine nature.

Christians show the features of Christ in themselves, not as copying a model external to them, but as made sharers of His life. The same identical life appeared first in its plenitude in Him, and afterwards partially in His members, according to the measure of grace

which each one has attained. Christ reproduces Himself in them by the imparting of the gift of His life. This life of His when received becomes the dominant principle within, subduing all things to itself by the working of its mighty power. For this, S. Paul cried, "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." This subjugation of the soul and body to the mysterious influence of the new life mingled with man's being is, however, a thing of gradual growth only. The germ received is often allowed to rest uncultured and unfruitful. In few cases are men's characters so remarkably influenced that they become at least in some points striking likenesses of Him, who imparted to them the principle of their new life. Such cases, however, have never been wanting in any age. An eminent one occurs in the Acts of the Apostles, where the prayer of S. Stephen for his murderers, and his dying commendation of his spirit to his Lord, are the reproduction in him of what had already shown themselves in Jesus Christ. Apart from such singular instances, the character, temper, and virtues peculiar to the life of Christ re-appear, in a measure, in vast multitudes of His members. The whole tone of society has been elevated by them.

His example and His doctrine were not sufficient to work these effects in His own lifetime, even upon His immediate disciples, much less could they do so when now viewed at a distance. The union between Him and Christians is not merely that of Master and disciples. Nor is it a union of support, such as that given to a

building to the upper stones by the foundation. It is a vital union, as He Himself explains it, such as there is between the vine and its branches. The same sap and life permeates the stock and the outermost twig. Cut off the branch from the vine, and it must die. Cut off the Christian from living union with Christ, and his Christian character and virtues perish. The union between the Christian and Christ is closer still than that of the branch and the vine. It is like the organic union between the limbs of the body and the head. This union is not merely of our spiritual part, but our very flesh and blood are the flesh and blood of Christ. We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones, so that the Apostle cries out in horror, "Shall I take the members of Christ and make them the members of a harlot?"

This close union between Christ and Christians is effected by His Spirit given to them in this sort first on the day of Pentecost. It is by His Spirit He abides in them and they in Him, and if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His. After the Ascension of our Lord into heaven the gifts of the Holy Ghost underwent an entire change of character, resulting from the reception of the human nature of Jesus Christ into the glory of the Godhead. A new economy of graces and gifts thence arose, which had for its object to extend to the members of Christ that plenitude of the Spirit which had, whilst He was on earth, been restricted to the Head. The Holy Ghost took of the things of Christ and applied them to Christians. The sevenfold gift became theirs as

flowing from Him. The fruits of the Holy Ghost, never before in such measure seen in men, now appeared. The renovated and exalted human nature, perfected by sufferings in Christ, passed by the renewing of the Holy Ghost to those in union with Him. This was not done by an influence of the Holy Spirit upon them from without, or by occasional touches of actual grace; but now there was within them an abiding presence. Nor was it merely an infusion of grace, but this grace was rather the result of the permanent in-dwelling of the Holy Ghost Himself. The Apostle Paul distinguishes the effect from the cause when he says, "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, Who is given to us." The Holy Ghost is the gift, and the grace of charity flows from that gift. By this in-dwelling not only is the soul sanctified, but the body itself becomes the temple of the Holy Ghost.

Take away the gift of Pentecost, and the whole fabric of Christianity would fall into ruin. It is the Paraclete, the Comforter, that enables Christians to live the measure they do live of the life of Christ. The kiss of the Father and the Son has been given to mankind that, according to our Lord's prayer, they may be one in the Father and the Son, as the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father. This communion with the Father and the Son by means of the Holy Ghost lifts men out of themselves into a higher sphere. The Creator, stooping down, draws up the creature by the kiss of His Mouth. The sweet caresses of grace strengthen them against all assaults.

Year by year, as the days of the Church go on, and another Pentecost arrives, the same mysterious kiss of love is given by the Mouth of the Eternal. It is for us to prepare our souls for Him by prayer, as the Apostles did with the holy women and the Mother of God, longing earnestly for a closer union with God through this gracious kiss of love, "Let Him kiss me with the kiss of His Mouth." This is all that I long for, I faint, I die, unless I get this grace. This grace will alone enable me to overcome flesh and blood, and all the evils of my lower nature. With this grace I shall be able to go from virtue to virtue, until this corruption shall have put on incorruption, and mortality shall be swallowed up of life.

XVII.

Crowning of King Solomon.

"Go forth, ye daughters of Sion, and see King Solomon, in the diadem, wherewith His mother crowned Him, in the day of His espousals, in the day of the joy of His heart."

THE festival of Corpus Christi is the crowning solemnity of all the Church's Feasts. It is her last act of homage to her Lord, the culminating point of all her praises. Just as His love could stretch no further than this act of giving us Himself in a sacrament, so her glorification of Him can find no higher expression than the Feast of the Lord's Body. Ravished with His love

and with His beauty, she calls all the children of faith to her solemn procession, that with the eyes of the heart they may behold His transcendent glory. "Go forth," she says, in the mystic words of the Cantic of canticles, "go forth, ye daughters of Sion, and see King Solomon, in the diadem, wherewith His mother crowned Him in the day of His espousals, in the day of the joy of His heart."

These words, in their literal sense, speak of the custom amongst the Jews of the bridegroom being adorned on his wedding-day with a wreath or chaplet. To this custom Isaias alludes, when he compares the future glory of Jerusalem to that of "a bridegroom decked with a crown, and a bride adorned with her jewels." Then, when the bridegroom went to bring home his spouse, a number of young maidens went forth with lamps to meet him, and to escort the bridegroom with his bride in a gladsome procession to their own home. The true Solomon, of whom the first was but a figure, is described in the Apocalypse as having "on His Head many diadems." There are three particularly which suit the solemnity of this day, according to the different mystical senses, that may be thought to be signified by the word "espousals."

The first diadem is the crown of flesh, which our Lord received from mother earth, when He became man. Then was fulfilled that longing desire of the prophet: "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just One; let the earth open and bud

forth a Saviour." For as the body of the first Adam was formed out of the dust of Paradise, so was the Body of the Second Adam, formed out of the earth of the animated Paradise of God; that is, from the flesh of the Blessed Virgin Mary His Mother. Wonderful and strange union of the Creator and the created, which infinite love could alone have conceived, and infinite power could alone bring about! The sun sends forth its rays into the cloud, and receives fresh glory, from the splendour of its translucent brightness. So the Word of God filled with glory the fleshly nature which He took, and made of it a diadem, by which to set forth, with more brilliance, before the eyes of men, the exceeding great beauty of His Godhead. With such excellence did He fill it, and to such a dignity did He raise it, that at His very first assumption of it, on His entry into this world, the Angels of God were called upon to adore.

In this crown of flesh our Lord appears in at the solemnity of Corpus Christi. For in the Sacrament of the Altar that same Body is present which was born of Mary. The Altar becomes another Bethlehem, where we may adore the Word made flesh; not beholding Him, as the Magi did, in the arms of His Mother, but in the hands of the priest of God under the sacramental veil. "Go forth, ye daughters of Sion, and see King Solomon in the diadem, wherewith His Mother crowned Him, in the day of His espousals, in the day of the joy of His heart."

2. The second diadem is the crown of thorns, given

to our Lord by His mother the Jewish nation. God did this honour to the Israelites, that He was pleased to become, like them, a son of Abraham, a Jew according to the flesh. But "He came to His own, and His own received Him not." For blessings they gave a curse ; for love they gave hatred ; for flowers of delight they gave Him a crown of thorns. This crown of thorns is the symbol of the whole of His Passion. In one instrument of His Passion the whole is brought before our view. The Holy Eucharist was especially ordained by our Lord to be a commemoration of His bitter Passion. In it He does not simply give us His Body and His Blood, but it is His Body broken and His Blood shed. As the Blessed Sacrament is an extension of His Incarnation, so it may be also said to be an extension of His Passion. He lies on the Altar, as it were, in the state of death. All the ceremonies of the Mass have a relation in one way or other to His Passion and Death. The same Body is present from which the water and the Blood flowed forth. We see Him coming forth wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. We see, it is true, not with the eyes of the body, but with the eyes of faith. We know Him to be truly present, Whom the bodily senses cannot discern. We bow the knee before Him, not in mockery as the soldiers did, but with adoring reverence, acknowledging Him for our King. Him we hail, Him we worship ; Him, with our whole heart's affection, we laud and glorify. He is the Solomon, that is, the Peaceful One, Who made peace

between God and men by His Blood, taking away the handwriting that was against us, and nailing it to His Cross. He is the true Solomon, making peace between man and man through the unity of His Church, and breaking down the partition wall that separated the nations of the earth from one another. He gathers them together, and of many making them one, He espouses them to Himself with an espousal of Blood. His Bride the Church is taken out of His opened side (as Eve was taken from Adam), whilst He slept on the cross with His wedding diadem on His brow. This was the longed-for day—the day of the joy of His heart, when His purchased Bride should be given Him. All this is mystically set forth in the Sacrament of His Body broken and His Blood shed. The Church calls us to behold that spectacle on this day: “Go forth, ye daughters of Sion, and see King Solomon, with the diadem, where-with His mother crowned Him, in the day of His espousals, in the day of the joy of His heart.”

3. The third diadem is our Lord's crown of glory. He received this at His Ascension into heaven. But a more solemn coronation will take place at the Last Day. The King of Glory will then again enter heaven with His elect, and they shall be to Him for a diadem of beauty and renown in that day. The everlasting doors shall be again lifted up, and the King of Glory shall enter into His eternal city, His faithful ones circling round Him in brightness and beauty unspeakable. It is His Mother herself who shall crown Him. None so fit as she for

this office, the co-worker with Him of their redemption ; He on the tree dying for them, she beneath the rood bringing them forth to Him by her sorrows and intercession. Each one shall she present to Him on this day of His espousals, when the marriage of the Lamb shall be come, and His Bride shall have made herself ready. That day shall be indeed the day of the joy of His Heart ; a day of joy without mixture of sorrow, when He shall wipe off every tear from every eye, and there shall be no crying, nor mourning, nor sighing any more, for the former things are passed away.

The procession of Corpus Christi, and the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament on the throne, are a sort of rehearsal for the still grander procession that will then take place, when every eye shall see Him, as He seats Himself on the great white throne. The burning lamps and candles are figures of the Saints and Angels round His throne. The sweet incense that is strewed on His way, or ascends in odours before Him, is an image of their prayers and praises. The flowers are feeble types of those flowers of Paradise that never die. The same Jesus Christ is truly here, though hidden beneath a veil. "Come then, let us worship, and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker." Go forth, ye daughters of Sion, go forth out of the clouds of the senses into the bright light of faith. See King Solomon, that great King, upon whose vesture, and upon whose thigh is a NAME written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords ; see Him by anticipation entering the heavens with the diadem, with

which His Mother crowned Him. Join in the throng of happy souls that circles round Him, or bow low in the homage of your enraptured heart, as He passes on in radiant triumph to His exalted throne. Let your music and your canticles of joy prefigure the sweet strains of the heavenly harpers, harping with their harps. Then, having confessed Him before men, you may by His plighted word be assured, that He will one day confess you before His Father, and before the holy Angels in heaven. Ask of Him that by His benediction you may receive grace to persevere faithful unto death, and so be worthy to receive the crown of life, which all shall have that unfeignedly love Him. They shall have it in that day of His espousals, in the day of the joy of His Heart, when everlasting gladness shall be upon their heads, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.

XVIII.

The Apple-tree.

"As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons: I sat down under His shadow Whom I had desired, and His fruit was sweet to my palate."

THESE words of the Bride in the Canticles may be beautifully applied by every devout soul to Christ in the Holy Eucharist. When we visit Christ in the most Holy Sacrament, and meditate on His glorious

perfections, then we sit under His shadow: when we receive Himself in the Holy Communion, then may we say that "His fruit is sweet to our palate." These words of the Spouse are an answer to the commendation bestowed upon her by her Beloved in saying to her, "As the lily among thorns, so is My Love amongst the daughters." Delighted with His praise, she in turn seeks out by what comparison she may set forth His high glories, and she breaks forth into the words, "As the apple-tree amongst the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved amongst the sons: I sat under His shadow Whom I had desired, and His fruit was sweet to my palate."

2. But why, out of all the trees that she might have named, does the Spouse fix upon the apple-tree as the tree to which she shall liken her Beloved? She looks not to the strength of the oak, nor to the wide-spread branches of the terebinth. She passes by the lofty height of the cedar, and turns to the lowly apple-tree, about which indeed there is nothing of majesty, nothing grand, nothing splendid. There are many trees that have more of stateliness or are more beauteous to the eye than the apple-tree, but these trees are barren; they bear either no fruit at all, or none suitable to the use of man: these trees of the wood are a good shadow for the cattle; they give food for the birds and lower animals; but the apple-tree spreads its leafy bower for man. Whilst he rests in its shadow, he refreshes his weariness with its fruit. It has not fruit only,

nor shadow only, but fruit and shade at the same time.

The apple-tree, then, in this way excels all the trees of the wood, as Christ excels the rest of men. God gives to all men certain good gifts, sending His rain upon the just and on the unjust. Some estimable qualities remain even in depraved man, as there are beauties to be admired in the trees of the wood. In wicked and worldly persons there may be great comeliness of form, high intellect and talents, a refined imagination, and excellent taste. These things are full of charms for us; they render their possessor admirable and attractive; they are God's footprints. By earthly minds these footprints of God are esteemed to be the most sublime treasures, and the possessors of such treasures the only truly happy. Not so by the Angels or the devout soul. The devout soul looks further. She sees the barrenness of these empty grandeurs, this splendid show. She sees that, compared with those of Christ, all these excellencies are but as dung; that His wisdom infinitely exceeds the most boasted achievements of human talents, and is alone satisfying; that under a modest and unpretending exterior He hides untold grace and glory. She fixes therefore on the thought of the humble apple-tree, laden with fruit, and offering at the same time a sweet shade, as contrasted with the barren forest trees. She esteems it, in this contrast, an apt figure of her Beloved, and cries out, "As the apple-tree amongst the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved amongst the

sons : I sat under His shadow Whom I had desired, and His fruit was sweet to my palate."

3. It is not thought generally by commentators that by the apple-tree is meant the tree that bears that name in these countries, but rather the citron-tree, whose description answers much better to the apple-tree of the Scriptures than the tree known as the apple-tree with us. This latter tree is indeed very uncommon in Palestine, and its fruit poor and unpalatable. But the apple-tree of the Scripture bears evidently a most delicious fruit, as is plain from the expression, "Comfort me with apples." The term "like apples," is used in another verse of the Canticles as descriptive of a most sweet fragrance, "*The odour of Thy Mouth is like apples.*" The colour is spoken of in the Proverbs as like gold, "Apples of gold in beds (or dishes) of silver." All these characteristics answer to those of the fruit of the citron-tree, as known at the present day in Palestine. It is, doubtless, of this tree and its fruit, that the Spouse speaks. Its height is not great, nor does it spread its branches very widely; but still it affords a thick, refreshing shade; the more so, as its leaves, which always remain green, send forth an exquisite perfume. It is not properly a garden tree, requiring the continual tending of man's care, like the vine or fig-tree. It comes a step nearer to the forest trees, growing as it were wild, and without culture, and so is more suitably named in companionship with them, though standing out in strong contrast with them by the deliciousness of its fruit and the refreshing perfume of its shade.

This uncultured tree, with its delightful fruit, well represents Christ with His uncultured wisdom, of Whom the Jews said, "How knoweth this man letters, never having learned?" He had not been taught it at the feet of Gamaliel, but had received it direct from His Father on high. His holiness stood not in His exact following of the precepts and traditions of men, yet it far exceeded the most strict righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. Compared with them, and indeed with the founders of all the religious systems that have ever been in the world, He so excels, that they are to Him only like the barren forest trees alongside of the fruitful and shady citron. Ravished with admiration at the consideration of His glories and graces, the devout soul cries out with the Holy Spouse, "As the apple-tree amongst the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved amongst the sons: I sat down under His shadow Whom I had desired, and His fruit was sweet to my palate." "I sat," she says, "under His shadow." There was a time when she knew not Him; Who is as the shadow of a great rock, which standeth out in a desert land. Now she knows Him; she sits under His shadow. She did not always so sit. Once she wandered up and down, even as others. She sees others now in the burning sun, toiling up and down in the dusty desert of this life, scorched by the blazing heat, while to her it is given to sit in the cool, to be refreshed under the fragrant shadow of this Tree. As these contrasts pass before the eye of the devout soul, her wonder-

ing rapture is enhanced to see that granted to herself, so unworthy, which to others has not been given to enjoy. Why or wherefore it is so with her, and not so with them, is quite beyond her ken to fathom. She must leave this with God. Her gratitude and delight at her own lot are not, however, the less because she is unable to say why she has been brought to such favoured bliss. The bliss fulfils, and more than fulfils, all the brightest dreams fancy had ever painted of true happiness. It fairly surpasses all she had ever desired. Her desires never went so far as this accomplishment of them. "Yes," she says, "I sat under His shadow Whom I had desired, and His fruit was sweet to my palate."

4. This happiness none need be strangers to. Our Lord has brought this Tree close to every one of us, that there may be for us no excuse. He has hidden Himself in the Blessed Sacrament of His Love, in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. It is there He is like the apple-tree amongst the trees of the wood. Whilst we visit Him there, He will cover our weary souls with His shadow, and in the Holy Communion we shall find His fruit sweet to our taste. If the heat of a vehement temptation presses us, we have only to come into the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, and presently, under the cool of His shadow, it will have disappeared. Are we deserted and forlorn, and is there no one to care for us? Here we find the Friend of the friendless, "the Friend that is more friendly than a brother." In companionship with Him our loneliness is gone; we are

refreshed under His shadow. Are we suffering great pain of mind or body? We may come here and compare our pains with His. Then His will so far exceed that, lost in compassion for Him, we shall forget our own. So in all our trials, afflictions, or persecutions, we shall find a sure refuge under His shadow.

But if His shadow is insufficient for our comfort, behold, He will give us His fruit also. The fruit of a tree is, as it were, all its most excellent juices gathered together into one sweet morsel. So our Lord has gathered together all His most costly graces and virtues, and gives them in the most Blessed Sacrament to the soul as a most delicious morsel. It is a compendium of every good thing, a concentrated quintessence of love, just as the fruit of a tree is the product of its most exquisite juices. The fruit of a tree is its own very substance, the marrow of its strength. So the Blessed Sacrament is our Lord's own very substance, not some gift external to Himself, but His own very Body and Blood. Just as a mother feeds her babe with her own very substance, and gives it of herself, in providing her milk for its food, so our Lord feeds His chosen with His own substance, the fruit of the Tree, His own Body and Blood. Love contrives this. Love brings about this wonderful thing, for He knows that nothing else would satisfy us but Himself. The devout soul, therefore, does not so much seek this or that particular grace by coming to Holy Communion, but rather she desires to receive Christ Himself, His very Body and Blood, His soul and

Godhead, that she may thus, by an ineffable union, become one with Him, and He with her. This alone can content her ; after this she longs and sighs. This is the culminating point which she labours to reach. She is restless till this be attained. But when it is won, she is at peace ; she sits down thoroughly satisfied. The accents of her voice gently breathe forth then these words, "As the apple-tree amongst the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved amongst the sons : I sat down under His shadow Whom I had desired, and His fruit was sweet to my palate."

XIX.

The Sacred Heart.

"Thou hast wounded My Heart, My sister, My spouse."

THERE is no devotion in the age in which we live so eagerly received as that towards the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is because the thought of it helps us so much to realise that which we cannot fully comprehend of the character of Almighty God. It brings Him, so to speak, in a measure within our reach, Who is lifted so far above us.

God is spiritual, without passions or feelings, and it appears to us a sort of unreality to speak of His love and compassion when He does not feel in some way as

we do. These attributes without feeling seem, to our manner of thinking, cold and dry. We care not for such love, such compassion. It does not move us; we want the love, the compassion, the sympathy of a human heart. We know something what that is like, of however exalted a nature. We have a measure for it. We want some one who can sympathise with us, and with whom we can sympathise in return. This craving of ours is supplied by the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is so human, yet so exalting. At the same time as it stoops to us, it also lifts us up. Thus it satisfies, being human and Divine. It is such a comfort to be sympathised with by One so exalted, yet with a sympathy so real. It is an unspeakable blessedness to be allowed to sympathise with Him, and to see Him even looking for our sympathy, receiving it from us, as a grateful refreshment.

Now there are three wounds which we may give to this Heart of our Lord, wounds which He speaks of in the text, when He says, "Thou hast wounded My Heart, My sister, My spouse." The first wound is a sad and grievous wound, the wound of an enemy, the wound inflicted on His Heart by mortal sin. The sin of the baptized kills Christ afresh, killing Him in that life which He has taken in all and each of His members. There is something extremely horrible in this. It is called by the Apostle "a trampling on His Blood." It is like the act of a son striking his father. To be sinned against by the heathen, by those that know not God, is nothing compared with the sin of the baptized, who have been united

to Christ's very Body, of Which they have been made members. There is such an unnatural enormity in such sins that the Angels cry in wonder to our Lord, "What are these wounds in the midst of Thy Hands?" And He in sorrow answers, "With these I was wounded in the house of them that loved Me."

A holy woman in a vision saw certain persons going up to our Lord with a spear, which they unfeelingly thrust into His side, and at each thrust there came out great jets of blood. This was but the figure of mortal sin. Our Lord looks at you from the Cross; and what does He say? He says, "Thou hast wounded My Heart; yes, thou, My sister, whose nature I have taken; whose Brother I have become out of pure love; thou who art My spouse, whose human nature I have wedded to My Divine nature by an indissoluble union!" Can we bear to hear this reproach? If we have given our Lord the wound of sin, let us heal it by the wound of repentance.

2. Repentance is the second wound. Our repentance wounds the Heart of our Lord. He is grieved for our sorrow, as S. Paul was moved by that which he saw in his disciples, whom he had so severely chidden. He repents when we repent; as God says to Israel, "My heart is turned within Me; My repentance is stirred up; how shall I make thee as Adama, and set thee as Seboim?" That is, "How can I punish now? My own Heart is torn and wounded with sympathy for the sorrow I have caused in thee. For a small moment

have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee." When we come back to our Lord as prodigal children, sobbing and telling all our wickedness, and wondering if He will forgive, our pain causes pain to Him. "Thou hast wounded My Heart," He says; not now with the wound of sin, but with a sweet wound—the pain of sympathy. He is touched with a feeling for our infirmities, Who has the same human nature, and is our Brother, being in all points tempted like as we are. "Thou hast wounded My Heart, My sister, My spouse." When we accuse ourselves, He excuses us, knowing by experience the clay of which we are made. He excuses us from the love He bears to us, which makes Him feel pain in condemning us.

3. There is another wound likewise with which the Heart of Jesus is wounded. It is the wound of love. Oh, that He may be able to say to each of us, "Thou hast wounded My Heart, My sister, My spouse, with the wound of love!" The wound of love has a terrible smart,—terrible, but delicious. The pain of it, so severe, yet so sweet, ravishes the heart, and takes its life away, giving it a death-sickness. No one knows what the wound of love is but he who has felt it. Its pain is a more exquisite delight than all other happiness. We wound the Heart of Jesus Christ with this wound when we despise everything for His sake; when honours are offered in vain, riches have no attraction, the gaities of the world become an irksome thing; when pleasures sadden because they separate from Him; when all the

most delectable things lose their savour, and we have no relish for them, because the soul is sick of love, languishing with love, fainting for very desire of her love. This disposition of mind takes Jesus captive. He is wounded with love ; He can resist no longer the charms of those graces He has Himself bestowed. Ah ! He says to that soul, "Thou hast wounded My Heart, My sister, My spouse."

He does not desire that this wound should be healed ; He desires rather that it should be made deeper and wider. This, then, must be our endeavour ; this the engrossing aim of all our thoughts. He holds His Heart before us for this end, that we may aim at it the shafts of a burning love,—a love that shall be to us an enthusiasm, a devouring passion, possessing us wholly, leaving room for nothing else.

Let the time past suffice, in which we wounded our Lord's Heart with the wounds of sin. Let us not wound Him even by coldness and neglect. The unwillingness we betray when He calls for some little sacrifice goes like a wound to His Heart. He is saddened and distressed to find us barren and unfruitful after so much care. He comes looking for grapes, and finds wild grapes. After all our promises of service and devotion, have we watched with Him even one hour ? How pained He is when all His fair hopes are blasted in the bud ! Alas ! what disappointments we have prepared for Him ! Will it ever be better ? We must trust that it will by His grace. We must not give up the attempt.

Strengthen the feeble knees, and lift up the hands that hang down. Cast down, but not in despair, let us expect that of Him which we cannot ourselves obtain. By His help we may leap over every difficulty.

O Sacred Heart of my Saviour! since I have wounded Thee so often by sin and neglect, grant me to wound Thee by my repentance, and by the wound of love!

XX.

The Poverty of Jesus Christ.

"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that being rich He became poor."

IN these words S. Paul sets before us as an example the holy poverty of Jesus Christ. Being rich He became poor. Contrasted with the immensity of His riches, the straitness of His poverty stands out all the more markedly clear.

It might almost be said of Jesus Christ that this poverty was His leading characteristic trait. It was the feature that most struck the prophets and saints of old, as they looked in visions on His future coming. David, speaking in the person of Christ, says, "I am poor and in labour from my youth." Jeremias in like manner says of Him, "I am the Man that hath seen poverty." S. Jerome, on the passage, "Blessed is the

Man that considereth the poor," says that this Poor Man signifies Christ our Lord. It was this feature of Christ's poverty that Zacharias so exulted to behold in the coming Messias, when he cried out to the Jews, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion: shout for joy, O daughter of Jerusalem: for behold thy King will come to thee—poor." After the exordium with which the prophet commences we should have expected some brilliant description of the pomp and majesty surrounding the King whose arrival he announces; but no! the prophet's eyes were gladdened at the sight, not of His grandeur, but of His poverty. He is poor, and riding upon an ass. This was the token to his prophetic gaze of the Just and Saviour.

As our Lord was when pre-announced, such was He also in His actual coming. Poverty was His distinguishing badge, and He bore it through every varied phase of His earthly career, from the cradle to the grave. "The Word of God," says S. Bernard, "had such a love of poverty that, not being able to find it in heaven, He came down upon earth to seek after it." Having found poverty, He made her His bride; He carried poverty about everywhere with Him, like a garment which He could no way be induced to part with. And the poverty He loved was not an ordinary poverty, but a poverty in extremes. The spot He chose for His grand entry into this world, His birthplace, what was it? An outside shed, a shed for cattle, a stable: this is the place of His Nativity. He came into this world an outcast; the

brand of extreme poverty is stamped upon His brow. The poorest of earth's children are richer than He. The first persons to whom He reveals His Advent, who are they? They are the poor. He draws them around Him at once as His chosen companions in His earthly pilgrimage. The shepherds of Palestine, as in France and other countries at the present day, were of the poorest of the peasantry. A poor shepherd signifies one quite illiterate and uneducated. David, when a shepherd-boy, was despised both by his father and his brothers as one of no account. Our Lord therefore gathered them around His crib as His natural friends; He shows Himself poor amongst the poor; He lies there in the manger on a little straw, wrapped in swathing bands. This is the sign by which He is recognised.

It is later on that He invites the Eastern Magi to pay Him homage. To them also He shows Himself poor, although a King. No worldly state surrounds Him. No obsequious courtiers. His cradle is not of silver or gold. He has no adornments, or trappings of silk and purple. He is seen in the arms of a poor village maid. There is nothing of splendour or grandeur to catch or satisfy the carnal eye. All is poor. It is only by the eye of faith that the invisible greatness of the King of kings is seen. This illumined vision alone beholds it.

As our Lord began, so He continued His earthly course. He, the Lord of heaven and earth, was subject to His Mother, and, according to tradition, used, when a boy, to assist her in the household duties. As He grew older

He learned the trade of His foster-father. He was not only called the carpenter's Son, but even Himself "the Carpenter." It was the custom amongst the Jews that all should learn a trade. But when it is said of our Lord as in contempt, "Is not this the Carpenter?" we see that the trade He chose was not an honourable one, but the trade of the poor and despised. Doubtless, as His foster-father grew old, He Himself bore the heaviest part of the toil. His Hands were hard with labour, and He knew by experience what it was to be worn-out with weary work. He was poor and in labours from His youth. Thus, in His foster-father's declining years, He was the main support of the holy family.

When Joseph was taken away by death, and He began His sacred ministry, it is to Him but another phase of holy poverty. He gathers round Him disciples from among the poor,—“unlearned and ignorant men,” as they are styled. The common people it was who gave Him their sympathy and heard Him gladly. When He would give John Baptist a convincing token that He was the Messiah Who should come, after mentioning His miracles He closes up with the most signal mark of it,—namely, “to the poor the Gospel is preached.” To the rich He almost seems to shut the gates of heaven, saying that they shall hardly be able to enter there; but when, in His sermon on the Mount, He would give some detail of His doctrine, the opening sentence is, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Poverty of spirit is made the foundation of the whole

spiritual edifice. It is its very key-stone. Without it all must collapse into inevitable ruin.

Our Lord's manner of life is conformable to His doctrine. He lives as a poor man, as the poorest of the poor. When one came to Him and said, "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest," He answered, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His Head." He had no certain lodging for the night; sometimes a cottage, sometimes the mountain in the open air. We read that once, when very weary, He lay asleep on a pillow in the hinder part of the boat. The rude planks of the boat were His bed; He was accustomed thus to sleep, and the surging storm did not rouse Him from His slumber. He knew the hardships of poverty by experience. His food, how simple, and how plain,—the food of the poor: bread and fish and water, bread often not of the best, but barley bread. He knew what the pangs of hunger were like. We find Him sitting weary at the Well of Sychar, and so thirsty that He asked the woman who came to draw water to give Him to drink. His disciples coming presently, having bought bread in the village, press Him earnestly, saying, "Master, eat," for they knew that He had been long without food. He eats not, He drinks not, He has meat to eat of which they know not, His meat is to do His Father's Will, and to finish His work. He passes by the wants of nature to supply the need of famished souls. Our Lord then did not merely preach poverty, He practised it, He tasted

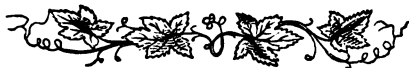
its nature. During the time of His ministry He lived upon alms. Judas, the traitor, kept the bag in which they were bestowed.

However, our Lord did sometimes dine at the tables of the rich ; but even here He took a low place and kept the station of poverty. We find Him treated as a poor man. Simon once asked Him to his house, but how did he behave towards our Lord? He did not vouchsafe to bestow on Him the usual civilities of life. He gave Him no water for His Feet, no oil for His Head, no kiss of welcome. It was enough condescension to ask our Lord to sit with him at meat at all. He treated Him for the rest as one inferior to himself, and received Him with no marks of honour. He gave Him the lot of the poor.

Such was our Lord in His life ; such was He also in His death. In His death He was stripped of everything. Even His clothing was all taken from Him. A hard bed was that to die on, the bed of the Cross, harder than the dying-bed of the poorest beggar. Even the poorest have some little comfort given to them, but He could not even get a drop of water in His extreme thirst. His friends and acquaintance fled from Him. He says : "I looked for some one to have pity on Me, but there was no man, neither found I any to comfort Me." Even His Mother, the last thing left to Him, He stripped Himself of, giving her to S. John, that He might depart out of this world altogether naked and bare. But, at least, God is left to Him. No ! not even this. "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me !"

Such was our Lord in life and in death, from the cradle to the grave. And shall we, who have embraced holy poverty, be content with its bare name, and shrink from its hardships? Shall we murmur at discomforts, or even go so far as to look for luxuries? He has left us an example that we should follow in His steps. He will only recognise us as His own if we are poor. Let us ask of Him to stamp upon us the brand of His poverty, stripping ourselves of all superfluity, and content with what is meanest and worst, that we may be poor not in word and in tongue only, but in deed and in truth.

My Jesus, I see it—I see how very different I am from what Thou wouldest wish me to be. Be pleased to give me more of Thy own Spirit, and fashion me after Thy pattern. Alas! wretch that I am, I try to please myself with the thought that I have embraced Thy poverty. Yet I take good care to shun all its inconveniences and discomforts. Be Thou pleased graciously to work a change in me that, having truly become a partaker of the straitness of Thy poverty in this world, I may in the next be made a sharer of Thy heavenly riches.





THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

XXI.

The Conception.

"Thou art all fair, My Love, and there is no spot in thee."

KNOWN unto God, says the Apostle, are all His works from the beginning of the world. That which was defined as a dogma of the faith but a few years back had been decreed by the wisdom of God from all eternity. I speak of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Mary Mother of God, of whom it is said by the Holy Ghost, "Thou art all fair, My Love, and there is no spot in thee." It is this foreknowledge of her conception that Mary speaks of in the Book of Wisdom, when she says "Before the mountains were brought forth, I was conceived." Before ever this world was made, the conception of Mary had its place in the Divine Mind, and this spotless one had the precedence of Eve in the order of the Divine decrees.

The plan of God therefore with respect to Mary was not deranged by the fall of Eve, nor was it, so to speak, an after-thought of His Providence for the remedy of sin. The fall of Eve did but add lustre to His predetermined scheme. "Who," says Job, "can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" That which was impossible to man was possible to God. The task was achieved in the Immaculate Conception of Mary. God's first pure creation of Eve had been sullied by the malevolence of Satan. His design seemed to have had an abortive result: almost 4,000 years rolled on, and still the tide of sin engulfed in its turbid billows each child of Adam. But all the more striking became the triumph of God after such a seeming failure. The victory was won when, with the foreknowledge of her persevering fidelity, He addressed the Immaculate Mary at her conception with those words, "Thou art all fair, My Love, and there is no spot in thee."

2. Although it is after so many years of existence that the Church has gathered up the tradition of her Saints and doctors in all parts of her world-wide dominion, and has set at rest the question whether the Immaculate Conception of Mary pertains to the original deposit of faith bequeathed to her in her infancy; yet God's revelation of this dogma dates from a very early period after the world's nativity. God proclaimed His programme, when, in denouncing His sentence on the serpent, He said: "I place enmities between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed." From the

very outset Mary and her Seed are excepted, according to the predetermined decree of God, from the general invasion of sin ; her Seed, on account of the hypostatical union in Him of the human and Divine Nature ; Mary by a privilege of grace, conceded to her because of her Divine Maternity.

As King Assuerus said to Esther, so God said to Mary : "Thou shall not die, for this law is not made for thee, but for all others." Mary was not to inherit that death which passed upon the rest of Adam's offspring through original sin ; she inherited rather from the first spring of her existence an irreconcilable enmity with him, the friendship of whom is death. God Himself stands voucher for her, that in no way shall the serpent find a friendly door of access into that soul or body, which He reserved as a tabernacle for Himself, a new spotless paradise of virgin earth, out of which He may form a body for His Son. His Son, her Seed, is to be the pure Fruit of a pure stock. Mary is to be a pure fruit, but drawn from a parentage stained with sin ; conceived of sinners, yet without spot of sin ; conceived, not as her Divine Son by the working of the Holy Ghost, but according to the general laws of nature, her spotlessness being alone above nature.

Just as when the priests, bearing the Ark of God, set the soles of their feet on the rising waters of Jordan's stream, the waters that were beneath flowed away, and those that were above stood in a heap, that they might pass over on dry land ; so, when the living ark of God

was borne into the world, the flood of sin stayed its course by the divine commandment, that she might pass without injury to her purity, according to the words, "Thou art all fair, My Love, and there is no spot in thee."

3. In this was the grace of Christ's redemption strained to the farthest, and that word of the Apostle was found true, that He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God by Him. In all other souls folly had been found, and even God's Angels were not pure in His sight—of Mary alone could it be said, "Thou art all fair, My Love, and there is no spot in thee. My perfect one is but one, she is the only one of her mother." Mary is the Church's solitary boast; she stands alone, unique in creation, being utterly faultless: she is like the pearl, which differs from other precious stones in this, that, turn it which way you will, it is on every side perfect and beautiful.

Other Saints have had their blemishes, but Mary had none. If there was no other blot on them, at least there was that of original guilt. Some who have become Saints were once stained with a thousand crimes. They had sold themselves to work all iniquity with greediness, yet they became purged by the grace of Christ and the outpourings of His precious Blood from every stain. In others grace had worked greater triumphs, preserving them from ever falling into any actual mortal sin; still they are conceived and born in the bonds of the enemy of souls. But let grace go a step further, and exert its

sanctifying power whilst the babe is still in its mother's womb, as in the case of S. John Baptist, still it has had no complete triumph.

In the very act of the transmittance of human life, sin set its seal on the soul. Sin had got a fortress, in which entrenched it could protest against the efficacy of the Blood of Christ. But in Mary's case this last stronghold of sin was taken, omnipotence could stretch no further.

"He saw of the travail of His soul, and was satisfied," says Isaías of Jesus Christ. The fountain of His Blood had saved one from all shadow of stain. It had reached its level: it could do no more. Sin had surrendered, entirely vanquished, unable even to touch the precious soul of Mary. At the very first instant of her being, Mary's soul was flooded with an ocean of grace and gifts from on high. The Father Son and Spirit looked down with delight on this object of their predilection. The Angels were all enraptured at the sight of her whom they recognised as their Queen. They caught up the word, "Thou art all fair, and there is no spot in thee." Earth now does the same, not as of old, in a vague, indefinite manner, but with clear articulate utterance. Mary is proclaimed as immaculate in her conception, all fair, no spot in her.

O Mary! our Queen, we cannot reach the far-off height of thy sinless purity, but obtain for us at least that, being washed and made white in the Blood of the Lamb, we may one day stand without spot or wrinkle, or

any such thing, before His throne, who is thy Saviour as well as ours, to hymn with thee His praises for ever and ever.

XXII.

The Nativity.

"My perfect one is but one; she is the only one of her mother, the chosen one of her that bore her."

WE keep this day the Nativity of our Blessed Lady. Notwithstanding the large mixture of sorrow in the cup of life, a birthday is generally in a family esteemed an occasion of unmingled joy. The gladness felt is in proportion to the greatness of the parentage of the newly born stranger, and the lot likely to be inherited in life, the destiny forecast. The birth of an heir to the lord of a great landed estate is esteemed not merely a matter of joy and congratulation to the family in which the event has taken place, but also this gladness is shared by all those who live on that estate, their lot being in a measure bound up with the fortunes of their lord. When a great kingdom receives an heir to its throne, rejoicing pervades a still wider circle. It is felt throughout the entire empire, and loyal hearts are filled with sympathetic gratulation at the occurrence of the happy event.

Such is the state of things in this world. There is, however, an empire far more vast than all the kingdoms of this world put together. There are interests at stake

of far mightier import than the most momentous affairs of this perishable world. There is a world to come, a world invisible, the busy place of innumerable companies of Angels and the souls of men. The future Queen of this heavenly country was born on this day, to begin her earthly pilgrimage,—she the Mother of its Redeemer and King, the co-worker with Him in the plans for peopling its courts with the children of men, saved by His Blood.

A conflux of many joys met together when this birth was celebrated. There was the joy of her aged mother, long esteemed barren, with that of her father and kinsfolk. Here the text was literally fulfilled of Mary, “My perfect one is but one; she is the only one of her mother, the chosen one of her that bore her.” The next joy was that of pious persons, who hoped much of a child born of one esteemed barren. They marvelled what this child should be, and for what end the Lord had showed that His arm was not shortened. They had not the clear joy that we have who now know, but their thrilling of wonderment and expectation was nearly akin to it. Then there was the joy of the Angels, to whom had been revealed the mystery that this child was to be the woman, who should crush the serpent’s head. With what transported love did they behold her, as she lay nestling on her mother’s bosom ! How they blessed and praised their God, both for His love to mankind and to themselves, in giving them so perfect and beautiful a Queen ! And lastly, high above all, there was the joy of God Himself, the divine complacency, as He again

beheld the work of His hands perfectly restored, after Adam had shattered it by original guilt. He could again look on what He had made, and pronounce it very good. There was a second spring in creation. The winter was past; the rain was over and gone.

The heart of God was comforted. It was the climax of joy, a joy originally springing from Him, and again reaching up into Himself. He the source of it in all its degrees, and containing in Himself all those degrees, and what was supereminently above them all. Within the Godhead Itself there were at the birth of Mary three joys permeating and interpenetrating one another. Each of the three Persons of the Sacred Trinity had a distinct and separate joy of His own, yet the joy of One of the Persons is always communicated to and shared by the Others.

And the joy of the Three Persons of the Godhead descended, by a free act of communication, to the first of the angelic hierarchies nearest to the throne, and from thence passed on in due order of succession to the whole of the heavenly court, being transmitted in turn, in a secret and hidden manner, to the souls of the just upon earth. In proportion as the distance from God increased, the impression received was less and less distinct; yet all felt it, even if they could but imperfectly comprehend and understand it.

The joy of the Eternal Father was something akin to that gladness which thrilled in the secret pulses of the Divine Being, when, after making a deep sleep to fall

upon Adam, He had taken from him a rib, and built the rib into a woman, whom He brought afterwards to Adam. Eve was His own daughter, as Adam is said to be the son of God. Not mediately, but directly, He had formed her, and given her life. She was perfect in her kind, of most exquisite symmetry and beauty, the fitting workmanship of the Divine Hand, fair, and without blemish or any imperfection. Far different was Eve from what woman is now, in the inward faculties of mind and heart, and in outward perfection of personal beauty. Compared, however, with Mary, Eve was but as a model of clay compared with a statue of marble or alabaster.

Mary is the only one of her mother, our corrupted nature's solitary boast, the clean thing brought out of the unclean. She is like the dove whose cote is filthy, but herself pure and undefiled. Mary is the chosen one, forechosen by the Eternal Father to be His beloved daughter, His perfect one. Mary is that "Prince's daughter whose steps are beautiful in the shoes of the Gospel of peace." The beauty of her soul shows itself outwardly by her gait, her whole conduct in her walk through life. She is the King's daughter, all of whose glory is said to be within, because the glory that appears without is so far surpassed by that which still lies hid within, that it appears as nothing when compared with it. The joy felt at the Nativity of Mary is the reflection of the joy of the Eternal Father when He first looked upon His child, that child who was born to be our Queen. Our hearts throb in unison with the Divine

pulses, and send forth their freeborn homage to Mary His chosen child.

The second joy in the Godhead was that of the Eternal Son, who had forechosen Mary to be His Mother. She was the daughter of the Father, and the Mother of the Son. The decree of the Incarnation by the Father, and the acceptance of that decree by the Son, involved necessarily the notion of the Mother, from whom the Son was to take flesh. It was not by accident that He was to come into this world and take human nature, but Mary was ordained and prepared to be His Mother. Her birth gives joy in proportion to the exalted state to which she is to be advanced. No degree among creatures can be higher than that of being made the Mother of the Creator.

There was a third joy, that of the Holy Ghost. Mary is called the Bride of the Spirit, because the marriage between God and man took place in her chaste womb by His operation. He it was that at the very outset of her existence, even in her very conception, took possession of her with a holy jealousy, lest sin should get before Him, and have some share in her. He endowed her with all His goods, as far as she was capable of receiving them. He embellished her with every grace and ornament. This first gift He so worked with, as she grew in years, that it bore fruit a hundredfold, increasing in force and intensity, and enlarging every day the energy of its sway. This continued during the whole of Mary's life, and at certain

periods, as at that of the Incarnation, the graces He gave were more sublime in kind, as well as higher in degree. By His overshadowing, He then formed of her pure flesh and blood a body for God the Son. Through His operation, this body became animated with a human soul, and the ecstasy of love which possessed Mary at this time was His work. He gave her still sublimer gifts on the day of Pentecost, and to the end of her life kept perfecting the work begun at her conception.

If the joy at one's birth is to be proportioned to the dignity of the person, and the loftiness of the destiny to be inherited, what must have been the joy of the whole heavenly court at beholding the face of their new-born Queen? This reflected joy was felt on earth by the just. They caught indistinctly the shouts of mirth above, and the song of the heavenly choir. We now join our hearts to theirs. Many persons on earth, born to high destiny, fail to fulfil their part, and through their own fault lose their grand estate. It was not so with Mary. She fulfilled all expectations to the uttermost. She never grieved her Father, never dishonoured her Son, was never unfaithful to the Holy Ghost her Spouse. Let us beg her intercession on this day, that we may be in our measure like her. She never threw away a single grace. She never did a single action that was unprofitable, never had a single thought but what God inspired. Let us follow her example, and give ourselves to be moulded after her pattern.

The Presentation.

"My Beloved to me and I to Him."

FOR no one in all His multitudinous creation has God ever done so much as He did for Mary. To no one else did He so lavishly pour Himself forth in the fulness of His grace. The well of living waters which ran in a strong stream from Libanus flowed in all its plenitude into her soul, filling it with all His choicest gifts. Just as Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Only in the kingly throne will I be above thee," so would it seem as if God had said to Mary, "Only in the kingly throne of My Godhead will I be above thee. All the rest—all that can be given to one who is a creature shall be thine."

As far then as the great God could make Himself over to a creature, He made Himself over to Mary. His predilection for her was so great that His love could brook no delay, but at the very first instant of her coming into being, He entered within the gates of her soul, and gave her Himself, causing her by this grace and union to be conceived without spot of original sin. Mary then could more truly than any other exclaim, "My Beloved to me and I to Him."

This was the sentiment of her soul from the very outset of her existence. For as God had so freely and bountifully given Himself to her, what could she do in return, but

give herself all to Him? On the day of her presentation in the temple she did but ratify what she had done really in heart long before, indeed from the very first. Before she had done it secretly, within her own soul. Now she confirmed it outwardly and solemnly in open ceremony. By this act she did not really belong to God more than before, for He was always wholly hers and she wholly His. "My Beloved to me and I to Him." But still it was sweet to her heart to embody in an external action the vows of her inward self, for love is never satisfied, till by some outward symbol it shall have made itself over to the object of its love. This symbol it handles and feels as a sort of pledge and guarantee to itself of the deep reality. So it was with Mary. As with her years she increased in grace, she became every day more sensible of the great things God had done to her. She longed on her part to rivet the chains that bound her to her Lord. She would tie herself, if it might possibly be, more firmly, more closely, more irretrievably than ever she had yet done, to that God Who was so sweet and so gracious. She would cut away all the moorings that might have a semblance of attaching her to any other thing than Himself only. The conception of her heart found its expression, in this presenting of herself to Him in His holy Temple, to live there if it might so please Him all the rest of her days, wholly occupied in the things of His service, with nothing to separate her from Him. "My Beloved to me and I to Him."

Mary was but three years old when the event of her

presentation took place. Even ordinary children begin to show some amount of intelligence at this period of life, and to betray to outward observation the bent of their will and disposition. Mary, prevented in an extraordinary manner by the blessings of God's sweetness, in her conception without stain of sin, and filled from that time with the Spirit of God, was far more advanced in all that had to do with the understanding than children usually are. Nor must the mystical teaching of the Holy Ghost be ever subjected to the measure of common rules. Of S. Nicholas of Myra it is mentioned, that, though in other respects not seeming to differ from others in forwardness of the understanding, yet from his very birth he marked the weekly occurrence of the Friday, by abstaining on that day till evening from his mother's milk, which was his only sustenance. The Holy Ghost had taught him inwardly what he was as yet incapable of learning through outward instruction. Thus Mary, though young in years, yet nurtured by the teaching of the Divine Spirit, was already well learned in the science of the Saints. She offered herself therefore to God in His temple, well aware of what she did, and not led to it by any blind caprice or childlike fancy. The separation from her parents, the aged Joachim and Anna, was exceedingly painful both to herself and to them. She was just at that age when children cling so fondly to their parents, and become, on the other hand, so engaging also in their eyes. On both sides, then, their affections were entwined in loving embrace round each others hearts.

The parting was felt as a searching sorrow on either hand. But though Mary loved her parents, she loved God more ; and they, on their part, could not deny their most costly treasure to the God from Whose hands they had received it. They therefore put no obstacle in her way, happy at least in the thought that their child should so altogether belong to so great a Lord.

Behold, then, this little child ascending the marble steps which lead to the temple of the Most High ; mean and of no account in the eyes of men, but exceedingly great and precious in the sight of the Lord. She enters the sacred doors of God's House. She prostrates herself in adoring homage before the unseen majesty of Him Who has chosen it for His dwelling-place on the earth. The choirs of Angels are hymning His praises in the courts above, the heavenly harpers harping on their harps ; the twenty-four Ancients cast themselves down before Him, burning with intensest adoration ; the Seraphim, answering one another, sing before His throne the Holy, Holy, Holy, when this little alien voice of earth, mingling itself with their worship, gives to the great God a higher and clearer homage than all the combined hierarchies of that heavenly court. Not all of them put together can render God a worship so lofty, so sweet, and so ravishing.

That little child, now offering to God her homage in His temple, is the most exquisite work of His whole creation, before whom all splendours pale, and the brightest lights grow dim. This is she, of whom it is

said in the mystic language of the Canticles, "There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and maidens without number. My dove is one, My perfect one is but one ; she is the only one of her mother, the chosen one of her that bore her."

Such is Mary. She stands alone, immeasurably above every other created being, a hierarchy by herself. She is the pearl of great price, compared with which all other treasures are of no esteem. These words may be applied to her, which David speaks, "Her foundations are on the holy mountains. The Lord loveth the gates of Sion more than all the tabernacles of Jacob." For what form the culminating points in the perfections of the Saints are beneath the very first and lowest foundations of Mary's holiness. Her outward gestures have a greater charm in the eyes of the great King than all the best merits of the other Saints.

Like a translucent cloud, steeped in the vivid light of the Sun, so Mary drinks in the living light of God. She is flooded by this transforming radiance, and drawn by it yet closer and closer into Him Who is to her all in all. The cry of her heart is ever, "My Beloved to me and I to Him ;" and God is ravished with the worship thus given Him.

XXIV.

The Expectation.

"Show me Thy face ; let Thy voice sound in my ears, for Thy voice is sweet, and Thy face is comely."

THESE words are the prayer of Mary, desiring in longing expectation the birth of her Son. There is, perhaps, on the earth no joy so great as that a mother feels in beholding the face of her newborn child. It is for this reason that our Lord says, "She remembereth no more the anguish of her travail for joy that a man is born into the world." Her pains are all forgotten in the fulness of her pleasure. It matters not that to other eyes the face of her child is devoid of beauty, and has no comeliness in it to be desired.

To a mother's eyes the plainest face, when it is the face of her own child, looks beautiful, and what is to others unsightly, to her is full of charms. The sound of his voice, how it ravishes her heart, and causes it to tingle with a feeling of happiness with which a stranger cannot intermeddle, for none but herself knows what it is.

Till her hope has received its accomplishment, her expectant heart waits for it with a longing that is unutterable. If such is the case with ordinary mothers, how much more so was it with Mary ! It was almost nine months since the Angel Gabriel had entered her cottage at Nazareth, and had brought her the tidings that she was to be the Mother of the Son of the Most

High. At the moment she gave her consent, the mystery of God's Incarnation had taken place within her chaste womb.

Out of her most pure blood, by the power of the Holy Ghost, had been formed, in marvellous perfection, a body for the Son of God.

To this body thus conceived within her, at the same moment of time, there had been united an excellent and beautiful soul, and the Eternal Son had taken them to Himself by a personal union, filling the soul and body of Mary, now become the great Mother of God, with the streams of grace that flow from His Divinity.

Nine months of expectation had now nearly passed, and as the days were soon to be accomplished when the Mother should bring forth her Son, her vehement desire to see His beautiful Face greatly increased. Her heart cried like that of Sisera's mother, "Why is His chariot so long in coming? why tarry the coursers of His chariot?"

Hers was no ordinary child, but the Son of the Most High, formed not after the ordinary laws, but by the operation of the Holy Ghost; a Child in which no man had any part, but He was altogether her own, and the gift of the Almighty. Oh! when would the time then arrive, that her eyes might behold the King in His beauty, and she might see that Face, fairer than the children of men? When should it be given to her enraptured ears to hear the gracious words proceeding from His mouth; to hear those things which so many

prophets and kings had desired to hear, and had not heard? Till then what could her yearning heart do but cry, "Show me Thy Face; let Thy Voice sound in my ears, for Thy Voice is sweet, and Thy Face is comely"?

At length the wished-for day arrived when the Desired of all nations came forth from the prison-house of her womb, as the sunbeam passes through the pane of glass, without any hurt to her spotless virginity. How great beyond that of all others was the joy of Mary in beholding the sweet Fruit of her womb? It was a double joy, like two streams of clearest light mingling their rays each with each, and interpenetrating one another; joy in her Child, and joy in her God and Saviour.

As she looked on Him, she knew not if she must cherish Him in her lap, or fall on her knees to adore Him, whether she must feed Him with her virginal milk, or make supplication to Him as her God. She saw Him quite dependent on her; yet He was her Maker. He was her own true child; flesh of her flesh, He was fashioned in her own likeness, and moulded after her pattern. The very features of her face were to be seen in His. And yet under this harmonious complexion, this exquisite symmetry, there was a something more, which, lying hid, yet betrayed itself. She saw the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It was not the light merely of His beautiful human soul, gleaming through the clay that shrouded it; for a beautiful soul will sometimes light up even plain features with a lustre not their own. The light she saw was as far

above everything human as heaven is above earth. It was the glory of God manifest in the flesh, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

2. This glory of His hidden being, which she beheld with unveiled face, constrained her worship forcibly in sweet and adoring homage; yet, blended with it in inseparable union, there poured forth from her mother's heart also a tender, caressing love for Him, as her Child. This last joy no one could share with her; it was her own unique treasure. But the former was not her own alone. It was partaken of in measure by many others. Many others had joined in that cry, "Show me Thy Face, let Thy voice sound in my ears; for Thy voice is sweet and Thy Face is comely;" and He Whose delight is to be with the children of men was pleased to satisfy their longing.

Joseph, the virgin spouse of the virgin Mother, was the first to be gratified with the sound of that voice, and the sight of that Face. The Shepherds were transported with gladness when they had gone with haste to see that sight, which the Lord had made known to them. What toils, what dangers the Wise Men went through, that they might hear that voice and behold that glorious Countenance. They were not disappointed when they entered the poor dwelling, and saw the Child with Mary His Mother. To them it was for all their labours an exceeding great reward. Simeon had received a promise from God that his aged eyes should not be closed in death, till they

had seen the Face of that Child. The glory of that sight was so great that he desired now to depart from earth, not willing that his sated eyes should be obliged to rest on any other thing.

3. We too must cry, "Show me Thy Face, let Thy voice sound in my ears ; for Thy voice is sweet and Thy Face is comely." For our Lord has Himself said, that, though the world seeth Him no more, His faithful ones shall still see Him. We must wait expectant with the expectant Mother, according to the words of the Prophet, "Though the vision delay, wait for it ; for it shall surely come, and shall not be slack."

The mysteries of the Kingdom of God have an eternal freshness, for their fruit continues always ; and year by year they come again as if they had never taken place before, because they are linked with Him Who is alive for evermore. Let us then say to Him at this time when He is again as it were to appear on the earth, "Hide not Thy Face from me, lest I become like those that go down into the pit. Show the light of Thy countenance upon me, and I shall be whole."

If we so pray, according to the dispositions of our hearts, and according to our necessities, will our Lord show to us the comeliness of His Face, and cause the music of His voice to sound in our ears.

To some He shows that Face in anger and reproach, as to Saul when on his road to Damascus. It is better to behold it in anger than to have it hidden altogether from our eyes, as it is from the world, which seeth Him

no more. In anger and reproach there are yet remains of love. But from the Pharisees, tempting Him, He turned away His Face, and, stooping down, wrote on the ground, as though He heard them not. To Zaccheus He showed His Face with a call to conversion, looking up to him in the tree, and telling him to come down, for that that day He must abide at his house. Thus salvation came to that house, and Zaccheus became a child of Abraham.

Peter saw His Face in contemplation, when it shone like the sun, and he said therefore, "It is good for us to be here." It was the sight of that Face and the sound of that voice that brought Mary Magdalen in love to His Feet after His Resurrection; for her soul melted when He spoke, calling her by her name. To the weeping women He turned His kind Face, and let them hear the sound of that voice, which had been silent in Herod's court, thus refraining them from over-much sorrow. Peter, when he had denied Him, saw that Face also turned to him, with such a look of pity and pardon, that his heart was broken up into fountains of tears, and the dry desert became pools of water. He will show Himself to us, if we pray; so let us not suffer the season to pass without our gift, and till we obtain it let us continually cry, "Show us Thy Face, let Thy voice sound in my ears; for Thy voice is sweet and Thy Face is comely."

XXV.

The Assumption.

*"Who is she that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights,
leaning upon her Beloved."*

THIS is what the angels said of Mary in the day of her Assumption into glory. Who is she, they cried, not as ignorant of the person of their Queen, but to express their ecstatic admiration at the superexcellent grace which enraptured their vision in the beholding of her beauty. It was as when of old Isaias saw in spirit the Lord of glory, Whose visage had been marred more than any man's, returning at length victorious from the conquests of His Passion; and at the seeing of Him, he cried out, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bosra, this One, beautiful in his robe, marching in the greatness of His strength?" Or, as when the same victorious King was received up where He was before, and the court of heaven came forth to meet Him, chanting the cry, "Who is the King of glory?" and answering one another, "The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory." So now, it was not ignorance that gave birth to this questioning; it was but the mode in which the angelic companies expressed the ravishing worship of their hearts at the sight of the high beauty of their Queen. "Who is she that cometh up *from the desert?*"

2. And this again was what added yet lustre to her

brightness, still further enhancing the marvellousness of her excellence. For she was not a flower nurtured in the Paradise of God, but her appearance was from the desert. When Adam sinned, the earth became a wilderness, producing but thorns and briars. Whence, then, had sprung this beautiful lily? The desert had blossomed forth a fairer flower amidst its arid sands — fairer than the fairest flower of the gardens of Paradise.

After Adam's transgression the earth had become the abode of sin for four thousand years; this unclean deluge had rolled on with increasing might, like the raging waves of the sea, casting up mire and dirt. A gloom of thick shadow was spread over the whole earth until Mary came, like the morning rising, fair as the moon, and bright as the sun: after the darkness of sin, Mary full of grace. "Who is she that cometh up from the desert, *flowing with delights?*"

3. Not only is she full of grace, but that fulness is to superabundance, flowing with delights. For whatever grace God could give her, He did give her; so that as the first Eve was like Adam, so was Mary the very counterpart of her Son, as far as her creatureliness could permit it. What He had by nature and could not be without, it was given to her to have by grace. She was like an ever-full cistern, close to the Well of Life, ever overflowed, and ever overflowing, with that water that makes glad the city of God. The rushing stream from Libanus entered into the sweet garden of her soul, that is, the floods of graces from the mountain of His God-

head. Not full only, but flowing, that sinners finding the well deep, and having nothing to draw with, should in their destitution apply to the easy access of this flowing cistern, and, borrowing from her superabundance, gain by her intercession what their own feeble prayer would never have obtained. Flowing with delights, like a garden enclosed indeed, but the sweet scent of whose flowers is of such strength that their rich perfume sheds itself far beyond the walls that enclose it, inviting the weary and the wayworn to its deep refreshment by the excellence of their odoriferous fragrance. "Flowing with delights, *leaning on her Beloved.*"

4. Here, at the end, we learn the secret of all from the beginning. Mary leaned not on herself, but on her Beloved. She knew that her beauty, her glory, her grace, were not her own, but the gifts of God her Saviour, Who had magnified her, and done for her lowliness great things. Through this knowledge, the more she was exalted, the more meek she became. She could do all things, but it was through Him Who strengthened her. In her own strength she could do nothing. She never made a single step of the way but as upheld by Him: and every step of the way, marked out for her by Him, going from virtue to virtue, she leaned on her Beloved. She leaned on Him, with confidence, all her weight. She knew His love, and was not afraid lest He might withdraw His support, and leave her to fall. And this great confidence was very pleasing to the Bridegroom Who had shed for her His Blood; and so He adorned

her with the costliest of His gems and jewels; for as she thus leaned, there was no danger of those things, which should have been for her wealth, becoming to her an occasion of falling.

And now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. Now He calls to her, "My love, My dove, My beautiful one, come from the clefts of the rock." And she quickly answers Him; for her heart has had no rest since He Himself went above—languishing with love, and longing for the time when the day of eternity should break and the shadows of earth retire. At last it came, and her beautiful soul fled away like a bird from the snare of the fowler. The Apostles gathered round her as she passed from earth; and when the spirit was fled, it was they who bore the body to the tomb. It was not, however, to remain there. During three days angelic strains were heard within. And then, as they ceased, the stone at the mouth of the sepulchre was rolled away by the Apostles; but the body of their Queen had been translated to another world, to enhance the glory of the soul, its companion.

Now, what Mary received at her Assumption, all the faithful may receive in their measure. All that have been counted faithful shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Think what glory, what grace, what beauty! The least one shall become as a thousand. The splendour of their brightness will be such that of each the Angels may cry with vehement admiration, "Who is she that cometh from the desert? For this

life is like a howling wilderness, compared with that heavenly country, *flowing with delights*.

Each one flows with delights, for no one receives graces simply for himself, but they flow forth upon those with whom he is brought in contact, kindling in others the desire of better things, and drawing them away from what is base.

All, however, must be done leaning on the Beloved. If Mary, pure and spotless, had so to lean through the frailty of her creaturely nature, how much more we that are enfeebled by sin. Nothing so grieves the Bridegroom of our souls as the refusing to lean upon His love. Some refuse from pride, others from a false humility—fatal error, for left to ourselves we stumble along the road of God's commandments with halting step, when, if only we leaned on His strength, He would make our feet like hart's feet, and the loftiest mountains would be easy as a plain. We should, by the help of God, leap over every obstacle, shining more and more in all holiness and purity till fit for heaven. Then should we be met by the cry, "Who is she that cometh up from the desert flowing with delights, leaning upon her Beloved?"

XXVI.

The Coronation.

"And the king loved Esther more than all the women, and he put the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen."

ON the Feast of the Assumption of our Blessed Lady two mysteries are celebrated—the taking up of our Lady into heaven, soul and body, and also her Coronation there. These two mysteries, although connected in time, are separable in idea, and the assumption might have taken place, without the coronation. The coronation expresses a very different thing from the assumption. What took place in the court of Assuerus, at the coronation of Esther, is a mystic figure, describing what took place in heaven at the coronation of Mary. As Assuerus loved Esther more than all the women, and made her queen, so God loved Mary more than all other elect souls, "and He put the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen."

1. The advancing of Mary to be Queen of heaven was no arbitrary proceeding on the part of God. Mary was fitted for this dignity. She had three titles to it, each of them in itself a sufficient claim. Her first title was that of her Immaculate Conception, and all that is contained in this prerogative. By her Immaculate Conception, Mary was made Queen of the Saints, for the graces conferred on her by it raised her above all Saints and Angels. Speaking of Mary under

the figure of Jerusalem, David says : " Her foundations are on the holy mountains." By this is meant, according to Catholic commentators, that the graces Mary received at the very outset of her existence were more excellent and precious than those accorded to the rest of the Saints when at the climax of their perfection. Her foundations are on the top of the mountains. The lowest graces of Mary are above their highest. Again David goes on : "The Lord loveth the gates of Sion more than all the tabernacles of Jacob." The *gates*, i.e. the very entry and outermost part of Mary's excellencies, are dearer to God than all the merits of the rest of the Saints, figured by the tabernacles of Jacob. When Eve first came fresh from the Creator's hands, she was in all things faultless, the acme of perfection in the graces of womanhood, a queen in majesty and sweetness. So and much more was Mary, in the supereminent graces of her Immaculate Conception. She surpassed Eve as a statue of marble surpasses one of plaster. Eve's perfections, though so great, were such as yielded to the wily temptations of the devil ; but Mary was proof against all his fiery darts. Both in body and in soul, Mary was naturally gifted to be a Queen of mankind. As Saul, standing amongst the people, had a king-like appearance, through the majesty of his stature, so Mary was queen-like by the graces of her soul, and the exquisite comeliness of her personal beauty.

2. But her second title to the dignity of the queenly rank far exceeds the importance of the first. It is the

fact of her being the Mother of God. Like the Immaculate Conception, this too is not a barren fact. It has its fruits, its legitimate consequence. It affects both Mary's soul and her body. There is between a mother and the fruit of her womb an intimateness of physical union that is without parallel. It constitutes a portion, as it were, of her own life. The Blood of Jesus was the blood of Mary. The same heart regulated the pulsation of the Body of Jesus and that of Mary. The Blood of God flowed through her veins; and, as S. Augustine says, "The Flesh of Christ was the flesh of Mary." In consequence of the Divine Maternity, Mary touches upon the confines of the Godhead. "*Attigit fines Divinitatis*," says S. Thomas. She reaches the very next step to personal union with God. Her union with Him is only less than that hypostatic union of Jesus Christ Himself. S. Bonaventure says that to make Mary Mother of God required a sort of infinite effort of almighty power. "He that is mighty hath done to me great things." God displayed the extent of His power with an outstretched arm.

Mary was full of grace in her very Conception. But when the Angel salutes her as full of grace, at the time of the Annunciation, it signifies that her graces had reached a climax, which rendered her a fitting vessel for a grace of an altogether higher and more excellent *kind*. A material thing, when it has reached its fulness of perfection, is incapable of any increase of perfection. For instance, a perfect square or circle can never receive

greater fulness of perfection. But it is otherwise with intelligent and moral beings. They may receive a greater fulness not only of degree but of *kind*. One fulness prepares the soul for a greater fulness, the soul expanding and dilating in its reception.

Mary, then, having reached a crisis in her fulness of grace, was elevated by God by her Divine Maternity into a wholly different sphere of supernatural existence. By her union with the Incarnate Word she was made partaker of the Divine Nature in a far more eminent degree than other Christians, both because her union was closer, and her fitness for it rendered it more fruitful to her. Her union with Him wrought upon her a permanent impression, elevating her far above all the heavenly hierarchies. Her sentiments, her actions, were those of the Mother of God, just as the sentiments and actions of Jesus Christ were those of God Incarnate. The change in her was a substantial change, which affected her whole being. The dignity of being Mother of God was no external accident, but implies a union with God, and gifts of grace, proportionate to the dignity. As Mother of God, Mary's natural place is to be Queen of heaven. God loved her more than all others.—He put the royal crown upon her head, and made her Queen.

3. But Mary has likewise a third title to this crown. This is to be found in the co-operation she gave in the grand work of Redemption. Christ our Lord is King of men and Angels, having obtained for men the grace of

Redemption from their fall, and for the Angels the grace to persevere in the state in which God created them. As He is the King, Mary is the Queen. The Mother and the Child are linked together in this victory over the old Serpent, not only as themselves triumphing, but as lending to others the means of victory.

For the Church Mary wrought this work, when, under the Tree of Calvary, she offered up to the Father the Blood of her Son. The fruit of this offering began to be reaped at Pentecost. Then, in the mystic words of Solomon's Canticle, Mary cried out, "Arise, O north wind, and come, O south, blow through my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." The north wind is bidden to arise and be gone, and the south to come in its place. By the north wind is meant the influence of Lucifer, and by the south that of the Holy Ghost. The spices of the garden are the superabundant graces of Mary's soul, flowing out for the conversion of the world. Those converted by Mary's intercession are naturally her subjects. She is their Queen. As co-redemptress, she is Queen of men and Angels.

When, therefore, she is taken up on the day of her Assumption, where should she go to but to the throne prepared for her at the right hand of her Son? "At Thy right hand shall stand the Queen," says David, "in a vesture of gold." She is represented standing, as being still ready to help; for in heaven she continues the work of help in the redeeming of mankind which she began on earth. As she ascends to her place all the hierarchies

of the angelic host, and all the various orders of the Saints, do her homage. Whatever grace or excellence they have, she possesses likewise in a much more eminent degree. Thus she is Queen of martyrs, Queen of virgins, Queen of all the Saints. She is Queen of the Cherubim, Queen of the Seraphim, excelling the former in knowledge, the latter in vehement, burning love. She is Queen of all in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth.

As Queen she shows the almighty power; not almighty in herself, but in her prayers, for she never prays without obtaining her request. Nothing is too hard for her. God will refuse her nothing. She is called the hope of Christians, the refuge of sinners, the gate of heaven, shadows of the titles of the Redeemer of the world, which she receives for her co-operation. As the Holy Ghost bestows gifts and graces, so Mary dispenses as Queen. All graces come through her hands. Queen of heaven is no empty title. Mary truly and really shares the ruling powers of the King of kings. Whatever is communicable to a creature God gives to her. In her is to be seen the reflexion of the Divine attributes, as the moon shines lustroly with the borrowed rays of the sun; and so the mystic symbol is fulfilled, for God loves her more than all other elected souls: He has put the royal crown upon her head, and made her Queen.

XXVII.

The Lily amongst Thorns.

"I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valley. As the lily among the thorns, so is my love among the daughters."

AMONG all the excellent graces of Mary's soul, none pleased God equally with that of her humility. It is through this humility that, describing herself, she says, "I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valley." Humility is a grace which has its primary root in God Himself. In the deep stillness of the Godhead there is a something which is the counterpart of our humility, its type and source. Existing in the Divine Nature, it is very different from that shadow of it which imperfectly is found in men. This humility of the Godhead shows itself in the unobtrusiveness with which God governs the world. He, so to speak, hides Himself, and appears as little as possible on the surface, working rather in His operations by secondary causes. Our Lord, Who came to make manifest to the world the character of His Father, being Himself the visible image of the invisible God, points to His own meekness and humility as the things to which He would, in the chief place, draw man's attention.

The humility of Mary breathed forth an odour in the presence of God, more delicious than the most costly fragrance of other virtues. This truth is conveyed by the words, "I am the flower of the field, the lily of the valley."

You see what Mary compares herself to : a flower of the field. In seeking for something to which she may liken herself she does not choose a garden flower, a flower cultured with much care of man's hand, a flower esteemed a thing of price in the world's eyes ; but she calls herself a flower of the field. A flower of the field is a thing of nought, cometh up and is cut down, and no one pays any attention to it. Our Lord, speaking of these same flowers, even after extolling their beauty, takes away their name of flowers, and lowers them so much as to call them merely the grass of the field, which is to-day in the field, and to-morrow in the oven. This He does to mark more significantly at how low a rate such flowers are estimated. And our Blessed Lady, because she is so mean in her own eyes, if she must liken herself to a flower, will have it to be, of all flowers, a flower of the field, as much as to say, "What am I? I am but like a flower of the field, a lily of the valley."

2. For a second reason she likens herself to a flower of the field, a lily of the valley ; because these flowers are dependent wholly on the bounty and providence of God. They are neither taken care of by others, nor take care of themselves, but God clothes them. They take the soil as they find it, growing amongst the weeds and briers. They have heat and drought when God sends it, and abundance of rain when it is His Will. They have no shelter against the sun's scorching rays, they have no kindly hand to supply moisture to their roots when heaven denies its showers. They have no guard

against the violence of the wind or storm, or against the cold of the nights. As a flower of the field is thus abandoned to the care of Divine Providence, so did Mary abandon her soul entirely into His hands. She took no thought for herself, that He might take thought for her. She cast all her care upon Him. For the future, as well as the past, she left all to Him. She had no desires but that that might happen to her which was His desire for her. She had no regrets, because all had been done according to His Will. She had her pains, but she did not wish them to be one the less, because all had been weighed and measured by His hands. Her fears and her hopes were also all of them cherished with entire subservience to His Providence. She was ready at a moment's notice to part with her fondest hopes, or to endure that which she most of all feared, just as a flower of the field neither toils nor spins, but is there to grow or to be cut down—to be cut down, whether in the bud, or in the full flower, or in the time of seed.

Now let us look at the other side of the question. Mary has humbled herself to the dust. The care of herself she has abandoned, as she says in another place, "My own vineyard have I not kept." What does God do for her on this account? When she depreciates herself, He exalts her. That very image which she took as one of abasement He makes one of glory. If she will be as lowly as the lily of the field, He lifts up this lily and says, "As the lily among the thorns, so is my love

among the daughters." He accepts the comparison, but instead of His eye resting on the lowness of the lily, according to her intention, His glance catches its ravishing beauty, all enhanced by the thorns in the midst of which it is discovered.

You know what is said of the extreme beauty of the lily, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these lilies. Gorgeous as Solomon was in the splendour of his robes, and of his court, his pomp did not equal him to the beauty of a lily of the field. So Mary, the humble handmaid of the Lord, ranks high above all the rest of the daughters of creation, queens though they be; and is in comparison of all others like the lily among the thorns. Whatever beauties, whatever graces others have, in whatever grandeur they may shine when by themselves, yet, when placed by the side of her, their faces become black as a coal, and their comeliness is all changed into corruption. They are the thorns, she is the lily.

The lily, uncultured and uncared-for, excels in chaste beauty all the flowers of the garden. The neglect in which it finds itself neither impairs its comeliness, nor retards its growth. "I will be," says God, "as the dew unto Israel; he shall spring as the lily." The lily springs rapidly to perfection, trusting to the dew of heaven; so Mary, abandoning herself to the grace of God, and not relying on her own endeavours, grew up in comely beauty, going on swiftly from virtue to virtue, not hindering nor thwarting the designs of the Creator by the unto-

ward activity of the creature. This perfect abandonment was more pleasing to God than a thousand well-meant efforts for His glory. She did not lose by abiding restfully in His hands, but gained a hundredfold.

In the month of May let us take example by Mary, and say with her in deep humility, "I am but a flower of the field, I am a thing not worth noticing, I have nothing grand or attractive about me, I am not a great genius, or possessed of high talents, I have no position to raise me up before the eyes of men, I am but a flower of the field. But if I am poor and despised, and not worthy of notice, there is One that still cares for me, and loves me much, my good God, my Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for me. It is better for me that I am as I am, a mere nothing, but in His grace and favour, than that I should be lifted up in the esteem of men, and perhaps through pride lose the favour of my God. Thankfully will I remain as I am, nor will I envy the great ones of the earth, whose talents, or whose beauty, or whose eloquence, or whose rank, give them a charm in the eyes of their fellows." If we only had such sentiments, would not our Lord quickly cry of us, "As the lily among the thorns, so is my love among the daughters"? He would quickly take us up from the dust, and make us sit with the princes of His people. But because we cannot endure to be as a mere flower of the field, neither is His eye pleased with us, and He leaves us unregarded in that little greatness which we have managed to secure, that esteem which we prize, that self-complacency we do

not lay down at His Feet, to be rid of it. He cannot do any mighty works in our poor souls, finding them so full of pride and self-sufficiency.

In His mercy He withholds the plenitude of His graces, lest we should begin to glorify ourselves through the receiving of them, so that they would, instead of being for our weal, be to us an occasion of falling lower. We trust too much to our own efforts at humbling ourselves, and our humility is a forced, artificial, thing. The reliance we place on our self-help in this matter tends to make us proud rather than to make us feel little. We do not remember how the flower of the field depends all upon God for its dew and its sunshine. Let us be like this flower of the field, giving up our meddlesome activity, and resting our hopes of being better on the sunshine of God's countenance, and the dew of His grace, leaving our faults in His hands to be cured.

In this stillness we are still active in the depth of the soul, by the continual surrender it makes of itself into the hands of God. It is not a slothful inactivity, but a wiser and a more subtle way of using our energies. Nor need we fear that God will be wanting to us. If we thus wholly lose hold of ourselves, He will work the more freely. Much less ought we to heap up between ourselves and God false barriers, by pretending to think it presumptuous thus to hang all upon Him; by pretending our unworthiness, our diffidence in ourselves, grounded on the knowledge of past failures, and such like tricks of secret pride, which refuses to give up the

hold on self, and the reliance on our own activities. All such modes of thought have their root in dwindled conceptions of the Divine love and compassion, which infinitely exceeds all we can imagine. Our anxieties about ourselves do us no good, they only shut out the light and help of God.

Nor should we be discouraged or amazed at the badness we discover in ourselves. This surprise comes from want of humility, because we give ourselves credit for a degree of goodness in no way ours. And if we are bad, God does not despise us on account of our badness. We, on our part, should be well content that at least One knows the wickedness and depravity of our hearts to the full ; before Whom we can stand just as we are, seen through and through, and no artificial covering upon us to hide us.

Oh ! if we had but these thoughts of our true littleness and worthlessness, we could then say, " I am a flower of the field," and God would love us ; for, appearing thus without disguise in our lowness, we should be pleasing in His eyes. He would say of our souls, looking on us with a gaze of complacency, " As the lily among the thorns, so is my love among the daughters."

XXVIII.

The Garden Enclosed.

*" My sister, My spouse, is a garden enclosed ; a garden enclosed,
a fountain sealed up."*

WE celebrate this day the Feast of the Purity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In some parts of the Church another festival is kept, which bears a close affinity to this we now keep, namely, that of the most pure Heart of Mary. Mary's purity is principally in her heart. From thence, as from a spring, it flows over and pervades her whole being, both within and without. It is with regard to this her purity that the Bridegroom says of her, " My sister, My spouse, is a garden enclosed ; a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up."

The Bridegroom in the Canticles is our Lord Jesus Christ. He addresses Mary as His sister, because by becoming man He has the very same human nature as herself. " For this reason," says S. Paul, " He is not ashamed to call us brethren ; introducing Himself into the family of Adam, and deriving from him the like flesh and blood with ourselves, sin only except." Having lowered Himself from the Godhead to the manhood, He gives to Mary the loving name of sister. He then adds that of spouse. Spouses are persons who are promised to each other. When He calls Mary, " My spouse," He lays claim to her whole self. He as much as says, " You are all Mine, and I am all yours," according to the words,

“My Beloved to me, and I to Him.” Mary is not only His sister, but His spouse too, for from the first instant of her being she turned to God her Saviour, and gave Him her whole heart. He, by the grace of her Immaculate Conception, had given Himself entirely to her, as far as it is possible for the Creator to give Himself to the creature. In that one grace was contained a grace of union with Himself, closer, and more strait, than if all the graces of Saints and Angels had been together bestowed upon her.

He goes on to say, “My sister, My spouse, is a garden enclosed.” Here we see the purity of Mary. She is not like any garden into which the passer-by may enter at pleasure, but she is a garden enclosed. Gardens are considered very great treasures in the East. In them are grown fruits and flowers, and aromatical spices. An enclosed garden is a place to which its possessor may retire for repose in solitude, or in which he may hold commerce with close and intimate friends, they alone being admitted there to his privacy.

It was in a garden of pleasure that God placed the first man, Adam, at his creation. There, in the cool of the day, He used Himself to come to hold converse with His creature. This garden, however, was not a garden enclosed. The serpent entered there, and wrought in it the baneful mischief of original sin. Eve’s heart was like that garden, not enclosed. She admitted the tempter, and Paradise was destroyed. A new garden must God make, a new paradise, out of

whose virgin earth He might form a new Adam. This garden was Blessed Mary, out of whose pure flesh and blood God formed a body for His Son. She, however, was to be a garden enclosed ; not a garden into which the enemy might enter at pleasure, but one encompassed on all sides by such a hedge of graces, as effectually to shut out the foe at all points.

It is for this reason that our Blessed Lady is described also in the Canticles as like to an army set in battle array. For she is terrible to the camp of the malignant enemy, through the strength of the graces of God that are in her. Her first grace of her Immaculate Conception, preserving her purity at the first instant of her being, was the fruitful parent of many others. For from that instant she was all for God. Her turning was always towards Him. She never cared for the pleasures of the world, for her heart had been won before her eyes were opened to its glittering tinsel. Her thoughts ever floated upwards, her desires were only fixed on Him Who is the Sovereign Good. He only had admittance at will into every secret pathway of her soul, and to all else the door was closed. She was a garden enclosed, full of fruits and flowers of God's own planting, watered with the dew from above, and sending forth a delicious odour in His presence. And her plants were faith, and meekness, and charity, and holy wisdom, and innumerable other graces and virtues.

After the description of the spouse as a garden enclosed, it is then said of her that she is "a fountain sealed

up." Water is of such value in the East that it is a regular article of commerce, and is sold in the streets. Good water is at all times difficult to obtain, and is often fetched from a great distance. From hence is the force of the words, uttered of our Lord's Gospel-grace by Isaias, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money let him come and buy, without money and without any price;" and our Lord's own words, "If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Our Blessed Lady is described as a fountain sealed up. When a well or spring of very pure water was discovered, a stone was placed over its mouth to guard it from the defilement of the dust driven by the wind, or from being filled with dead leaves and other corrupting matters. The fountain is fastened with a seal, that no man may have access to it but the rightful master.

Our Blessed Lady is that pure cistern of Bethlehem, of which the second David, David's Son and David's Lord, longed to drink, saying, "O that some man would give Me a drink of the water of the cistern that is in Bethlehem by the gate!" Nor did He long in vain, the waters of her soul were kept still and clear for Him alone. Her affections were poured out as a limpid stream, free from all the defilement of the world or the flesh, like the waters of Shiloah, flowing softly. The seal over these waters was the Holy Spirit of God, and He the secret Source whence they first took their origin in her

soul. Her purity was an increasing purity, like a light shining more and more to the perfect day. It was not merely like the innocence of Eve at her first creation, but a purity rendered purer still by temptation. She was tried like silver in the fire, and no iniquity was found in her. She is the only one that ever continued undefiled in the way among all the creatures of God. Even in His Angels He found folly ; and the Saints are not pure in His sight, though there may be in them nothing of absolute sin. Of one alone it is said, "Thou art all fair, My love, and there is not a spot in thee." God's perfect one is but one.

We, however, also, each in the measure of which we are capable, ought to strive to attain the grace of purity. What is said of Mary is said in a lower degree of every elect and faithful soul, "My sister, My spouse, is a garden enclosed ; a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up." There are, ordinarily, three degrees of purity. The first is a cleanness from the guilt of mortal sin ; the second is cleanness from habitual venial sin and the affection to it. The third degree purges away some of the corruption of nature, exalting it and raising it up above itself, and purifying it from involuntary imperfections, such as a slackness of fervour in our works of piety, distractions in prayer, and the like. If we have the misfortune to be in mortal sin, let us first clear away that dark stain, asking God to place a hedge of His graces round our souls, that the enemy may never be able again to enter them. If we are happy enough not to be in mortal sin, yet let us not content

ourselves with this degree of purity, but guard our fountain so with the seal of grace that the dust of defilement and corruption may not render turbid the waters of our souls.

Even with a cleanness from all wilful venial sin we should not stop, but ever cleanse ourselves more and more from all affection or leaning to sin, from giving way to slackness and imperfections, from sinking with the heaviness of our corruption from the exalted standard we would reach. Let us filter all our affections and desires by passing them through God, loving nothing and desiring nothing, but for Him and in Him. Let us lift up the senses and all the lower nature into the higher and better portion of our being; and the higher let us lift up into God, supernaturalising everything in us and all that we undertake, so as thus to be purged from the corrupting filth of the inherent depravity of our wounded nature. Then the gates of our soul, that is, our memory, intellect, and will, being full of all manner of fruits, new and old, laid up for our Beloved, He will take delight in us as in a garden enclosed; and the affections which we render Him will be like a draught of purest water from a fountain sealed up.





THE INTERIOR LIFE.

XXIX.

Draw Me.

"Draw me; we will run after Thee to the odour of Thy ointments."

THESE words of the Spouse in the Canticles are a longing for the grace of the Gospel dispensation. "Draw me," she says; by which she would insinuate that unless drawn she cannot come. So impotent has man become through Adam's sin that he cannot even turn one step to God, unless God first turn him by His grace, according to that of Jeremias, "Convert us, O Lord, to Thee, and we shall be converted." Our Lord Himself says that no one can come to Him unless the Father draw him.

That grace which the Spouse longed for God promised long before it came, when He said by the mouth of the Prophet Osee, "I will draw them with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love." By the cords of Adam is meant

that human nature by which the Word would condescend to link Himself to mankind, that by it He might attach them to the Divine. He Himself also pointed out His Cross as the principal means by which this drawing should be brought about, saying, "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to Myself."

Even before His Cross, He drew men to Himself by the virtue that, like a sweet odour, went out of Him, giving them power to become the sons of God by grace, as He Himself was the true Son of God by nature. Much more, however, has He done this, since He trampled under foot the enemy by His Death, and through the veil—that is, His Flesh—opened the way to the most holy place, into which He Himself first entered. That same strange power of attraction which He exercised in Judæa, so great that it was said, "Behold the whole world is gone after Him," He now exercises in the midst of every nation and people that dwells on the face of the whole earth. His dominion is from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. No one escapes from His influence, whether it be the civilised or the savage, the learned or the ignorant, old or young, man or woman. He stands in the centre now, drawing all things to Himself, having established a throne which shall not be overturned.

But though the Spouse's prayer, "Draw me," has now been thus answered for all mankind, yet each one has it in his power to resist the drawing influence that affects him, and to refuse to run after Christ to the sweet odour

of His ointments. Nor are all equally drawn, but some in one measure, some in another. And those that yield to the attraction, yield, some more, some less ; so that there are an infinite variety of degrees of approach towards Him. Some follow Him whithersoever He goeth ; others follow, but not so far as to be drawn even within the pale of His Church, the pale of salvation.

It may seem strange to say that the heathen, whilst to the end refusing the Gospel, are yet drawn after Christ, and submit to His influence. They do so, however, not indeed directly, but in a mediate manner through their intercourse with Christian nations. They are constrained to lay aside many barbarous, unholy customs, partly by the weight of Christian opinion, partly by the authority of force. In the light of Christianity, their own religions become changed for the better, as it was with ancient paganism before its fall. They borrow, without knowing it, Christian light, transforming in a measure, by its aid, their own unchristian systems. It is so also with the infidels of the age. They borrow both their notions of God and the high tone of morality which they profess from that very religion they wish to overthrow. These are not the simple result of natural reasoning, but are received from the overflowing light of a Christianity which they cannot strip themselves of. Thus even outside of Christianity men are drawn more or less to Christ, and are influenced for the better by Him, coming within reach of the odour of His ointments.

Much more are those drawn who, in a form more or

less perfect, possess many of the great truths of the Gospel, or even the Sacraments, yet still are outside of that communion which folds together in one bond all nations, the Church set on foot by Christ Himself as His perpetual place of abode, in which alone men can be saved.

In the Church itself there is an outer and an inner circle. Not all those who profess themselves the children of the Church are the children of salvation. Not all those who bear the Name of Christ have the stamp of Christ upon them. Yet even wicked Christians often feel restrained from running the same lengths of riot which those are plunged into who know not God ; drawn at least in a measure by the power of the Cross, and by the attraction it still has over them, they are led to do some good things, and kept from the commission of many crimes to which the corruption of nature strongly urged them. It may be they never enter Christ's kingdom, but at least they will be saved from many torments they would have had to endure had they not done violence to themselves, through the help of His grace, to prevent falling into the lowest depths of Satan. They are bad, but not so bad as they would otherwise have been. Dying unsaved, they will be punished eternally, but all their struggles in answer to the drawings of grace will be taken into account to diminish their pains. The will having abandoned itself less greedily, less freely to the malice of sin, their sufferings will be proportionately less bitter, less intense. Even this diminution of eternal pain

is a great gain to those who have partially yielded to the drawing of Christ.

It is, however, in heaven itself that the saving and sanctifying effect of the drawing of Christ the Lord is exhibited. Here also is an outer and inner circle. Just within the gates are the infants, who have been rescued from the darkness by the purifying waters of regeneration, their brows yet bearing the pearly drops of the cleansing stream. They were taken off to their home before ever reason began to dawn. They are saved, but there are in them no merits to crown, for they have done neither good works nor evil. They did not prepare themselves for baptism. They did not ask baptism. They are saved by a pure act of grace, with no merit before or after. They are in halls of dazzling light, shining like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Their happiness is pure and perfect, not a spot, not a wrinkle in their robe clean and white; not the faintest shadow ever passes over the clear sunlight of their joy. They are the very lowest in the kingdom of the redeemed, the furthest from the throne of glory, the outermost ring of that great multitude that circles round the Lamb. Yet how different is their lot from that of those outside the gates, as far removed as light is from darkness. For those who suffer no torment of sense—nay, perhaps even have a natural happiness—cannot reach the only true satisfaction of their being, the enjoyment of the brightness of the beatific vision of God.

Infants dying after baptism, how happy they are in

the eternal bliss accorded to them ! But oh, how much more blessed are they who have something in them to be rewarded. Children, for instance, who have not yet come to such fulness of reason as to be capable of a deadly sin, are yet capable of doing many things by which they may merit an everlasting reward, a crown that shall never fade. An act of faith, an act of love, a little act of restraint of self-will, all within the reach of the very young, will each and all be rewarded eternally. They are something over and above salvation, a distinguishing thing, the property of that soul, and of no other. And if the smallest acts of the opening powers of the soul are a cause of such blessedness, how much more the strong acts of heroism of noble, perfect souls ! Even the repentant sinner, who, after a long life of sin, is saved at death by a sincere act of contrition, has, at least in this respect, a higher degree than the baptised infant who has died before ever coming even partially to the use of reason. The contrite sinner finds the life he has battled for doubly dear, as the result, not merely of grace, but of his own co-working efforts. The dark shades make the light still more pleasing. The bitterness of the conflict enhances the delight of the victory. Of souls thus saved, with more or less of reward, how infinite is the variety in the realms of bliss, all drawn thither by the sweet odour of the ointments of the Son of God. There is not one that exactly resembles another in all its points. Even those that seem most alike differ from each other ; just as on a plant the flowers that seem to

be the counterpart one of another, so great is their similarity, are, when closely examined, found really to vary in a clear and marked manner one from another.

How vast is the number of men who in the main live Christian lives, not aiming at anything very high, yet fulfilling their duties towards their Creator. Not a single good work which they do, through this drawing, will go without its justly weighed proportionate glory in the heavenly kingdom. Every good thought has its transforming power, and will be represented at the end of all things by a corresponding eternal change in the nature and character of the soul. Then shall the secrets of all hearts be opened, and then shall every one have praise of God.

But besides this vast multitude which no man can number, who have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb, there is also a chosen band who are drawn nearer still to God in the economy of the Gospel. These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, for they are virgins. These were purchased from among men, the first-fruits to God and to the Lamb. "And in their mouth was found no lie, for they are without spot before the throne of God." These are the elect of the elect, who have the Name of God and of the Lamb written in their foreheads, the new Name written which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it. These are they who loved not their lives unto death, but have overcome by the Blood of the Lamb and the Word of the testimony. Therefore, He

gives them to sit with Him on His throne, as He has overcome, and is set down with His Father on His throne. Such, in the mystical language of the Apocalypse, is the lot of those who have been so drawn to Christ as to give up all for Him, not counting their lives dear to themselves, if so only they may finish their course with joy, reputed all things as dung and dross for the exceeding great preciousness of Him, Who is to them their only joy, their only treasure.

"Draw me," they said; and He straightway began to draw them, not in His ordinary way, but after a new and hidden manner, such as He uses only with His chosen ones. They had caught a sight of His beauty, a sight He does not vouchsafe to all, and, entrapped in the snare, hardly knowing what they did, they could not choose but cry, "Draw me, and we will run after Thee to the odour of Thy ointments." It was not always so with them. Formerly they were well content to walk leisurely after Him on the beaten path. But now a strange fascination has come over them, and without measure or consideration they run after those things that lead to Him. They are bewildered with their own state, for that influence which has taken hold of them is so secret in its ways that it passes all the ordinary rules of reckoning. Sometimes it seems as if they were in a dream, and as if this dream might suddenly break up, and all be found to be unreal. And yet a dream it is not, for it is evidently working upon them a change solid and real. They are not what they were. They are so altered that

they wonder at themselves. The change is palpable. Their friends perceive it, and think it wonderful, unaccountable. It is the change of the Right Hand of the Most High. It is the hidden drawing of the Son of God. He draws when, and how, and where He will. No one is safe ; the most worldly as well as the pious ; the frivolous and vain as well as the more thoughtful and serious are taken in His net. A character of sober common sense is no guarantee against the extravagances He leads men into. Extremes meet in Him, and He shows Himself sovereign Lord of all, working with men just according to His good pleasure. He fastens upon some favourable trait in the dispositions of those whom He takes, and, making His entry into the soul by it, He draws thus the whole man to surrender to His sway. He will be content with nothing short of complete submission, and the soul herself becomes soon so enamoured of Him, so infatuated with love, that she hates anything in her that would seem to oppose itself to Him. She would be glad that He should use violence, if nothing else will strip her of that which prevents her being completely in His power. She would be so pliable to His Will as to be drawn this or that way ; as a feather is moved by the least breath of wind, her pleasure is in His pleasure.

When the soul has reached this state she cries habitually, "Draw me, and we will run after the odour of Thy ointments." And Christ the Lord continually draws her more and more, closer and closer winding His chaste

embraces round her. It is His ointments that allure her; that is His excellent virtues and graces which she longs for, just as we strive to draw into ourselves the odours of some sweet perfume. It is these ravishing odours which so inebriate her with delight that she has heart for nothing else. Everything is burdensome that interferes with the ardour of her pursuit after Him.

Happy and blessed are the souls which are thus affected. They run, they fly, on their way to God. They carry no weight with them, for these sweet perfumes which they inhale lift them up above themselves, and render them wholly spiritual. For the time the burden of the flesh is not perceived. Do we understand what these things mean? Are we of this happy, blessed company? If not, let us ask that we may be admitted to a share of this unspeakable gift. "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Our laggard steps will soon quicken, if sincerely and unremittingly we make our petition. Without this drawing we are helpless; with it we shall be very different. "Draw me," then! Let us say to our Lord, "Draw me, and we will run after Thee to the odour of Thy ointments."

XXX.

The Hands Dropping with Myrrh.

"I arose up to open to my Beloved; my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers were full of the choicest myrrh."

THE spiritual life is not all delights, but with the delights much of bitterness is intermingled. As the sweets are exceedingly sweet, so the bitterness is exceeding bitter. None but those who have tasted the sweets of the hidden manna can tell what its delightfulness is; nor can any conception be formed of its bitter-nesses but by those who themselves have known them.

It is the bitter-nesses of the spiritual life that the Spouse in the Canticles speaks of under the name of myrrh. "My hands dropped with myrrh." By the hands are meant the working powers of the soul, the memory and understanding. These are filled with bitter thoughts and broodings. Myrrh well typifies such things, because, though sweet to the smell, it is very bitter indeed to the taste. It is when the soul rises to open to the Beloved that these bitter-nesses are experienced.

1. Now there are various periods in the spiritual life when, in a more marked manner than is wont, the soul rises up to open to her Beloved. The first is the period of conversion. Jesus Christ stands at the door and knocks. Although He is not Himself to be seen distinctly, but only shows Himself through the lattices, partly hidden and partly exposed to view, yet

His knock is plainly to be heard. He touches the soul in a manner never before experienced, and the soul is moved at His touch. The graces given to the soul up to this period were only, as it were, the preludes of this grand movement. These graces had in them so little of what was remarkable, that they were received in a manner unnoticed, used as matters of course, having nothing in them particularly to strike the attention. The crisis of conversion comes at a period when the movements of nature and of grace have gone on developing themselves side by side for a considerable period of time, more or less in strife or in amity, one with the other, till it is clearly seen that they run in counter directions the one to the other, and the soul has to make a choice which to give her adhesion to.

As a general rule, the aspirations of the soul in young persons are greatly interfered with by the claims of nature, the desires of the body, and the curiosity of the understanding, without these latter things being at all necessarily sinful. As the body develops, its passions develop likewise, and the world courts the gaze and admiration of the intellectual powers. Happy is the soul that is converted before it has been stained with the vices of the world, or the unclean spot of the flesh: that has risen up quickly to open to the Beloved, her hands dropping with myrrh, and her fingers full of the choicest myrrh. It might seem that in such cases there would be no throes of bitterness through which to pass, but even such have often a bitter struggle. Often, when

free from sin, they are not free from the most vehement temptation. Their heart is a cage of wild beasts roaring and raving. Oftentimes they are so beset that it seems impossible to sustain the struggle any longer. They see themselves set up as a mark for the shafts of the Evil One. Any moment an arrow may fix its death-wound in the core of their heart. They marvel how they escape.

But much bitterer is the myrrh to those who have got themselves enmeshed in the toils of the world, or have their feet trapped in the sins of the flesh. Who can tell the bitterness with which they regard even the gift of life they have received from a loving Creator? As they look on this side and that, and behold pitfalls and snares hidden artfully all along the path, which it seems impossible to escape, then they wish they had never been born. To have been thrust into this world, without ever being consulted, with the tremendous risk and great probability of having for their lot the never-ending torments of hell, seems to them unaccountably cruel and unjust—an arbitrary and unfair thing upon a helpless creature. If only death were annihilation; but unfortunately it is not so. A relentless hand holds them fast to the existence God has given. Turn this way or that way, there is no escape.

Now, though the soul when in this state seems in rebellion against God, yet all this is permitted by Him for a merciful purpose. He wishes to let the soul see her own utter helplessness. He allows her for this end to fall from sin to sin, and that all her endeavours to lift

herself from its miry depths should fail. And when she is come to the lowest deep, and all hope of being saved seems lost, amidst the encircling gloom the star of hope gleams out, not clear at first, but as if in the mist. In the bitterness of the abasement and degradation in which she finds herself sunk, the knock of the Saviour is heard, hope revives, and she arises to open to Him, her hands dropping with myrrh, and her fingers full of the choicest myrrh—a contrition for her sins, and a regret for the hard thoughts she has entertained of Him. At her first opening she perhaps finds that He has turned aside, and is gone ; but this is only to make her more eager in the pursuit of Him, and after no long time she finds Him and holds Him fast.

Who shall tell then the thrillings of her ravishments ? how her heart melts away, with mingled amazement and love, to see herself, the foul and sinful one, held by Him, and fondled and caressed, Who is all holy and all pure ? She can hardly believe it to be true, it seems so wonderful. She would almost like to get away from Him, for very shame, and hide herself, through a sense of her great unworthiness. His love becomes a pain to her. She finds relief in tears coming from a new and softened heart. She feels that she never knew what real sorrow was till now. In the light of His love her former self looks so dark and hideous. By loving service for the rest of her days she must blot out the past. It seems to her impossible she could ever again wilfully offend.

2. Such is a picture of conversion, with more or less

of variation, according to the character of the soul converted, and its comparative innocence or guilt. The soul often imagines at this time that her hard work is over, and that all will be clear and bright for the remainder of her course. Not so, however. The first woe is past, but the second makes haste to come on. With some the light of conversion fades imperceptibly away ; with others it is clean quenched as in a moment. With some a certain gleam always re-appears from time to time ; with others the night becomes pitch dark, a darkness that can be felt. The things of grace have to the newly converted—partly from their intrinsic sweetness, and partly from their novelty—so great a charm as to withdraw the attention of the soul, for the time, almost altogether from every other thing. The world no longer has any influence ; the fleshly passions go to sleep ; communion with God is the soul's only desire. At first-waking, the eyes of the soul at once turn to Him, without effort, wondering to find Him always the same, still present. What light ! what joy ! Old things are passed away : all things are become new.

But after awhile the soul wakes up to see that the face of things has undergone a change ; when and where and how perhaps she is at a loss to tell, but the bright colour of the gold has become dim. She begins to wonder whether God is with her of a truth or not. A haze has obscured her spiritual vision. She begins to grow uneasy ; all is not as it should be ; the cloud thickens. Old temptations begin to show their faces, to

which she thought she had bidden an eternal adieu. New ones come, of a kind she never before experienced, never supposed she was likely to be assailed by. Their attacks are so fierce that at times she is on the very brink of yielding. She hardly knows whether she has not indeed yielded, at least inwardly. Perhaps by some sudden surprise, or in some unlooked-for way, she does actually fall. Oh, how unhappy all this makes her! She is come into the deep mire, where there is no ground for her foot to rest on. And although, if she does fall, she at once rises up and returns to God, she still feels very miserable at the knowledge of her weakness, and the doubt as to whether she may not altogether go back from God. In the thick gloom she cries with Job, "Oh, that I might be according to the months past, according to the days in which God kept me: when His lamp shined over my head, and I walked by His light in the darkness; and as I was in the days of my youth, when God was secretly in my tabernacle, when I washed my feet in butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil."

Alas! it is a weary business, toiling and striving and making no progress. Prayer, which was formerly such a delight, is approached with dread. Wearisome temptations seem determined to tire her out. Once and again, indeed, God shows His face, and it seems like old times; but before scarcely she has leisure to congratulate herself, it is gone again. Yet she is conscious that she still seeks God, and she feels that, after all, her present

state is far better than to be enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season, or than to be given to worldly vanities. Her soul is still anchored in God. Indeed, amidst all her discouragements, she at length discerns that in some things at least she has made an advance. Though less perceivably, God is really closer to her than in the former days. It is by her submission, by her endurance of hardships, fightings and fears, that the soul rises to open to her Beloved, her hands dropping with myrrh, and her fingers full of the choicest myrrh.

She finds her Beloved, and takes hold of Him now not only in prosperity but in adversity. She sees His Presence not only in the light but in the dark also. She finds a hidden comfort in the want of all comfort, knowing in the spirit that He is never so near to her as when He seems afar off. She is passed into a new and more spiritual state of being, purged from sensible things by the fierce trials through which she has had to go. The refreshment into which she enters is of a very different kind from what she formerly enjoyed : clearer, purer, and more exalted. What beforetime seemed so spiritual now appears, on the contrary, gross and heavy.

3. Such is a feeble sketch of some of the more prominent outlines of the second stage of the soul's progress. Sometimes she stays but a very short while in the first degree, at other times a considerable period. There are flowers that never open themselves fully, never become full-blown. So many souls never go beyond the first degree ; many also remain to the end imperfect in the

second stage, without ever reaching any part of the third. Very few make much progress in the third.

When the soul, by the discipline of the second stage, becomes purged from its grosser elements, her old temptations lose almost all their force as positive temptations ; and if they remain, they do so more as instruments of humiliation, and for her furtherance to a still higher degree of purity. Refined as her understanding has become in spiritual matters, she has a delicate sense in detecting the presence of sin, where others of a lower purity would never have noticed it. To her clean eyes there are faults in her conduct when others consider it perfect. The admonitions she receives from our Lord to be still more holy move her to rise and open to Him, cost what it may, the innermost door of her soul, pained to the quick that she is still so far from what He expects her to be, her hands dropping with myrrh, and her fingers full of the choicest myrrh. How shall she ever content Him in the exactions He makes of her? He seems to have no mercy on her. When her strength is gone, and her capabilities exhausted, He still expects the full task. With her best endeavours He finds fault, and shows up their imperfections in the clear light of His countenance. For He is like a refining fire and like the fuller's herb, and who is able to stand to see Him? At the sight of Him all her comeliness is turned into corruption, and her cleanest righteousness is like a filthy rag.

Souls far advanced are in a strait betwixt two things. First they fear the Divine judgments, knowing their own

sinfulness, and that His eyes are purer than the sun, searching the inmost hearts and reins. They fear, therefore, to stand before His tribunal. But again they desire to depart, that they may offend Him by sin no more. This life becomes burdensome to them, because the massy envelope of the body presses down the soul, and bars them from free communion with their only love. They sigh for the time when they shall be able to love without let or hindrance or interruption. When, therefore, He knocks at the door by the stroke of death, they rise to open; their hands, however, still all dropping with myrrh, and their fingers full of the choicest myrrh. And who shall tell the joys unending which they experience when they find Him Whom they love, and hold Him fast, never again to be separated from His chaste embraces; in Whose Presence is the fulness of joys, and at Whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

XXXI.

Till the Day Break.

"Till the day break and the shadows retire, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense."

LENT is the season which the Church sets apart for special mortification and prayer, in order to prepare our souls for the bright breaking of the Easter-day. How well suited then are these words of the Spouse to

this season; for by myrrh, which is so bitter to the taste, is aptly signified mortification; and frankincense is ever used as the emblem of prayer. When therefore we comply with the demands of the Church, we cry out with the Spouse, "Till the day break and the shadows retire, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense." The Spouse calls myrrh a mountain because it is such a difficulty to flesh and blood to undertake the task of mortification. She only speaks of the hill of frankincense because prayer, though not easy, has a less terrible appearance. In these two things the whole preparation of the spiritual life consists.

The Easter-day of a risen life will break upon us in proportion as we have with faithfulness given ourselves during the Lent to mortification and prayer.

We ascend the lower parts of this mountain of myrrh, when we begin to curtail the commodities of the body, when we cut away what nature desires in the measure of food, by giving it less than it craves for at the time of meals, or by diminishing the number of our repasts; or, again, by retrenching from it what is tasteful and palatable, according to what Daniel says, "I ate no desirable bread; neither flesh nor wine entered into my mouth."

Nature feels keenly these privations, and to them may be added the shortening or interruption of our sleep, the undertaking labours that are heavy or disagreeable, or base and menial, the refusing ease of posture to the body, and the comfort of warm or delicate clothing.

All these are to us as steps up the mountain of myrrh, where we must remain till the day break and the shadows retire. After we have ascended thus far, we must add to our mortification the pruning away of the less gross pleasures of the senses, the delight taken in hearing sweet musical sounds, the pleasure of social intercourse, the seeing of splendid spectacles, the gratification of the smell in perfumes and sweet odours. To forbear smelling a flower in order to comply with a secret inspiration of God is no small matter. To deny ourselves the glance of a momentary curiosity is a subtle and refined mortification of the will. We are advanced more than we could believe up the mountain steep, by acts so trifling and insignificant in themselves as these seem to be. For by such practices as these the natural desires of the heart are kept in continual check, and made to subject themselves to the will and good pleasure of God.

But to reach the elevated heights of the mountain, we must abandon wholly all our interests into the hands of God. We must have no attachment to any of our little plans, however much we may esteem them to be for the glory of God, but must be quite willing to see them meet with ill success. No desires, no regrets, no hopes, no fears must disturb us. The holy Will of God must be to us all in all. In bodily mortification we must use discretion, not going beyond our strength. The same is to be said as to the recreation of the senses, and of the mind. In case of sickness or weariness we may

advisedly allow nature to take pleasure in things ministering to the ease of the body and its comfort, as for instance in pleasant food. This pleasure, however, ought not to be allowed as an ultimate aim or end, but should only be permitted by the way, because, through this recreation of the body or mind, the glory of God will afterwards be more advanced.

But the abandonment of ourselves and all our interests into the hands of God may be made without any bounds or limits. Its measure is to be without measure. Nature is more mortified by its practice than by the most rigid fasting or exclusion of the pleasures of the senses.

When we do it perfectly, we have reached the top of the mountain of myrrh. Here we may gather the choicest of myrrh, most bitter to the taste and most sweet to the smell ; for this bitterest myrrh is a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour before God. In some part of this mountain let us take refuge during Lent, till the day break and the shadows retire.

2. To this mortification must be added prayer. The spiritual life consists of these two things, and neither of them is sufficient without the other. Yet of the two prayer is the principal and more noble part. For mortification is only of profit, as its practice enables the soul to pray better. Mortification beats down the will of corrupt nature, which is the greatest impediment to perfect prayer. It destroys sensuality, and eaves the soul in freedom for a higher work. The Spouse therefore

is not content with going to the mountain of myrrh ; she will go also to the hill of frankincense, till the day break and the shadows retire.

Lent is a time of prayer, but each one should betake himself to that kind of prayer that is most profitable to his soul. For beginners, and for persons not far advanced in a spiritual course, the most profitable prayer is vocal prayer. The advantage of vocal prayer is this, that we need be at no trouble to put the sentiments of our hearts into appropriate words. We find this already done for us. As we say the words, the corresponding sentiment fills the heart, and flows forth from it. We are taught also what sentiments we ought to have in our various dealings with God, when, without any form of prayer made ready for us, we should have remained in ignorance how to approach Him, and how to carry ourselves in His holy Presence. Those then that cannot pray without a book, or some form of prayer known by heart, should be careful to use such help. It is of profit also to learn, if they can, psalms and prayers by heart, which they may have ready for use in all times and places. By continual use of this method the mind becomes steeped in holy sentiments, and is able at all times to find words for the various religious feelings of the soul.

Another method of prayer is that which is called meditation; we reflect on the truths and mysteries of faith, as they bear upon the duties we owe to God and our neighbour. When we reflect on those matters

which picture forth the great love of God to us, these considerations excite us to love Him in return. The sight of the humility of our Saviour urges us to humility. His spending Himself on men makes us to desire to follow His pattern and do the like. Thus reflection on the lessons of the Gospel is a kind of prayer, leading to good resolutions and pious affections, by which the soul is raised up above herself, brought nearer to God, and strengthened in virtue. After awhile the soul becomes so penetrated with the knowledge of the mysteries and truths of faith, that at the bare consideration of them, without more labour, she feels moved to the forming of some good resolution, some prayerful ejaculation, or some aspiration of love. The effort in so doing becomes less and less, till at last they rise spontaneously as it were from the heart, and are most frequent and continuous throughout the day. Here is a proper work for Lent. In the consideration of the various incidents of the Passion of our Lord what ample matter for mental prayer! This, according to our measure, must be added to our mortification, that we may truly say with the Spouse, "Till the day break and the shadows retire, I will go to the mountain of myrrh, and the hill of frankincense."

3. Sometimes it pleases God Himself to guide our steps to this mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. He does this when, in ways known to Himself, He prepares bitter sufferings, either for the bodies or for the souls of His chosen ones. Sometimes He makes them

endure the inexplicable pains of bodily maladies, of which no physician can find out either the cause or the cure. No one knows what they suffer but themselves, who are taught by experience.

Sometimes He causes them to endure strange mental woes, fears which are unaccountable, of which they in vain strive to rid themselves; or it may be searching pangs, caused by involuntary thoughts and feelings, of hatred, anger, blasphemy, disbelief or impurity. What bitterness is not all this to a faithful and loving soul. She must be willing, however, to remain steeped in it, till it pleases Him to send forth His light and truth, "till the day break and the shadows retire."

He leads the steps of the soul to the hill of frankincense when it is He Himself that infuses the gift of prayer, so that the soul is rather passive than active, is drawn forward rather than herself walks, is lifted up above herself, rather than leans on her own efforts, and thus ascends the hill of frankincense. Here she finds a light which is darkness, darkness to the lower powers, night to the senses and the intellect. In this darkness she would fain wait till the eternal day break and the shadows of earth retire. If, however, we would tread our way securely to this mountain of myrrh, and this hill of frankincense, we must do so through the strength of the Passion of Jesus and the prayers of Mary. In their company we must go. Indeed, in a high and mystic sense it may be said that the Passion of Jesus is itself the mountain of myrrh, and that the prayers of Mary are the hill of

frankincense. The Passion of Jesus, which was to Him Who tasted it so bitter, is to us who have its fragrance the most agreeable and refreshing odour. It is an odour which so invigorates our feebleness as to enable us ourselves to take upon us a share in the like sufferings, in His great strength.

The prayers of Mary, when we devoutly invoke them, lend a portion of their perfume to our prayers, like the best and choicest frankincense mingled with what is of inferior value. Our prayers become more acceptable because united with hers, just as our mortifications do when united to those of our Blessed Lord. In the consideration of the Passion at this time, we go to the mountain of myrrh in beholding Jesus on the Cross, and to the hill of frankincense in the consideration of Mary at its foot.

In what work can we better spend this season, or even our whole life? The exercises of Lent should become in a manner the exercises of the whole year. The grand Easter-day will gather up in one all the lesser glories of its earthly foreshadowings. For both the same preparation is necessary. "Till the day break and the shadows retire, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense."

XXXII.

The Religious Habit.

"I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on again? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?"

THE putting off of the garment here spoken of by the Spouse denotes the putting away of an old manner of life and the entry on a new one. Such is the change that passes on the soul when with a true and full heart she sets her feet on the way of the Religious life, for her old things are passed away, and behold all things have become new. For her is created a new heavens and a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness. The outward ceremony of the putting off of the garment of the world is the token of an inward change of mind and spirit. If there be no change within, corresponding to what is done without, the ceremony of the putting off the garment is but an acted falsehood, a shell without a kernel. Have a care then, my Sister, that what you do to-day be no empty form, but let your heart go with your outward action that you may with deep meaning say: "I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on again? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?"

It is quite possible to put off the garment of the world without putting away the worldly heart. Those are not all Nuns within who are Nuns without? It is not the habit makes the Nun, but the mind and disposition. I am not here speaking of persons entering the Religious

state from worldly motives. In these days there is little temptation to do so. There are, however, to be found not unfrequently persons wearing the Religious habit for years, and dying in it, who have never had the Religious spirit. People mistake sometimes piety, that is mere secular piety, for the Religious spirit; they feel a great desire for the exercises of piety, and this they think betokens a call to the Religious state; but it is quite possible to have a singular degree of piety without any Religious vocation. The two things are of a character quite distinct, and should not be confused the one with the other. Persons called to Religion ought to have a certain degree of piety; but persons of very great piety are not, therefore, necessarily called to Religion. When pious persons not really called to Religion, commit the mistake of embracing the Religious state, it is a serious damage to the house in which they are received. And why? Because probably to the end of their days they will remain seculars in heart; pious indeed, perhaps, but seculars; for, as has been already said, it is not the habit makes the Nun, but the disposition of heart. For such to say, "I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on again?" is a simple delusion. In outward show they lay aside the secular garment, but their hearts are clothed in the same garment as beforetime.

Now one great criterion by which the Religious spirit may be distinguished from merely secular piety is the great value it sets upon all the things of the Rule. What ever is of the Rule it adheres to, it tries to observe with

exactitude. As S. Teresa says, she would willingly give her life for the smallest rubrics of the Church, so does the true Nun bend all her private fancies, private devotions, private spirit, to the spirit and observance of the Rule. Nothing is little to her which the Rule commands. She wishes to be moulded by it ; she feels that her perfection is intimately bound up with the keeping of it. She cannot do the smallest thing it forbids without a lively sense of reproach in her conscience. She smarts keenly for any negligence she permits herself to commit. Such is the Religious spirit.

On the contrary, one who has merely secular piety prefers her own special devotions to the things of the Rule. She cannot be brought to see the harm of inexactitude in what seem to her no sins, such as breaches of silence without occasion ; little breaches of obedience to the orders given by superiors ; the eating of things, or getting drinks, out of the regular times of meals ; the want of punctuality to the time of rising or retiring to rest, and a thousand like things. Such exactitude seems to her silly scrupulosity.. What harm can there be in dropping a word, either at forbidden times or in forbidden places, or to persons to whom she has no right to speak ? These and all other like irregularities are no matter of conscience to her. To be particular in such matters may be an ornament to the souls of those who have such a grace ; but such exactitude is in nowise necessary. Such things are after all trifles only. When persons who argue after this fashion

get into a community, how can their influence be otherwise than down-drawing? Their whole tone of mind is secular, and the genuine nature of their true piety makes the infectiousness of their evil tone of mind, and their bad example, all the more fatal. They defile the feet of others more than they defile their own. Their own good faith saves them ; but does not save others, who allow themselves to be drawn aside by their pernicious examples.

Now during the time of your Noviciate, my Sister, it must be yours to sound well your spirit, to examine well the character of your call ; for if you seek in the Convent merely an asylum for the free exercise of ordinary piety you cannot then say as a Religious can, " I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on again ? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them ? "

2. Besides those who have never really had the genuine spirit of the Religious state, there are to be found, unfortunately, some who, having once had this spirit, have lost it. These are backsliders. Such as these are in all respects worse than the former class. Having been unfaithful, and having lost their first love, the Rule becomes to them an intolerable burthen ; the enforcing of it is tyranny. It is not that their conscience is dead, but they ride over it. They turn a deaf ear to its voice ; hearing, but making as though they did not hear. Wretched and uncomfortable in mind, perhaps, at last they strive to palliate the evil, and to give a salve to their wounded conscience, by obtaining exemptions

from the regular observance ; exemptions which they in no way require, but which are extorted by unfair representations, or sorrowfully allowed to them by superiors for fear of greater evils. By specious pretexts, in which they themselves have, indeed, perhaps a half belief, they shake off or put off the Lord's yoke, once so sweet, but now bitter. Yet, like Noah's dove out of the ark, they find no rest for the sole of their foot. Their true rest is gone, and they find nothing to supply its want. These are they who have put off their garment, but have put it on again ; they have washed their feet, and now they defile them again.

When they entered the Religious state, then they put off their garment ; then they heard those words of the Prophet, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider ; incline thine ear ; forget also thy own people and thy father's house." They heard the voice of God to them, as to Abraham of old, " Come out from thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, into a land that I shall show thee," and they obeyed. They put off the garment of the relationship of flesh and blood, and forsook all, that they might gain Christ. Now, however, they put it on again. They are immersed in the worldly concerns of their relations, their family according to the flesh. Their bodies are inside the cloister, but their hearts entangled in natural ties. Their sorrows and their joys are those of their secular kindred and friends. They have put on again their garment, they have defiled again the feet they had cleansed.

There are other ways of again putting on the garment that has been put off. We may make a world for ourselves in the cloister, after having renounced the world outside. To get knit in the bonds of private and particular friendship is to do so ; to seek after this or that particular office or employment ; to be attached to some particular work or occupation, so as to experience great pain and regret at being withdrawn from it ; to be extremely unwilling to part with certain trifles which we have received permission to keep. Oh ! how easy it is, after having stripped ourselves of our garment, through one pretext or other, to put it on again.

3. The wise man has said that he who would enter the service of God must prepare his soul for temptation. In one shape or other, probably you, who this day put off your garment, will be tempted, and perhaps sorely tempted, to put it on again. Doubtless at this moment your purpose is firm, your resolution is fixed. You have no intention of returning to the world : quite the contrary. You feel sure you will never desire so to do ; but remember, " Let not him that putteth on his armour boast as he that putteth it off." It is one thing to begin well, and another to end well. Remember how, when Saul had been anointed by Samuel, it is said that God gave him a new heart. He began well. He was filled with a zeal for God, and the Spirit of God was with him. But in an evil hour he committed a great fault. He very imperfectly repented of this fault, and so he went from bad to worse, with better sentiments from time to time,

till his last ruin was sealed. Look at Judas, when he was chosen by our Lord to his place amongst the twelve, and look at his wretched end. How different he was, when first favoured with his call to the apostleship, to what he was when he had betrayed the Lord that bought him. Doubtless he was, at the first, a soul of beautiful promise, endowed with many good dispositions, and highly graced by God. But he fell away; gradually the bloom of his high purpose was brushed off by infidelity, till he remained as a dry stock, without fruit or leaf.

Be not high-minded then on account of the privileges of this day; but fear: lest you likewise should prove a traitor, and fall off from your first faith. "Hold fast that thou hast," says the Scripture, "and let no man take thy crown." This crown will only be given to you when you have fought well. When, therefore, the devil comes to you with his temptations, let this sentence be your watchword, "I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on again? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?" If he inspires you with a passing weariness for the state you have chosen, let this watchword excite you again to perseverance. If you perceive yourself getting a love of worldly conversation, and a desire of hearing dissipating news, arouse yourself to recollection with this watchword, "I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on again?" You may be tempted to go back in spirit and mind, at least, to home and worldly friendship, to the ties of flesh and blood, now renounced; but you must be on your guard and say, "I have put off my garment, how

shall I put it on again? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?" The old nature is not yet dead; it will strive to reassert itself, to resume its sway. Its claims must be met by a firm refusal: they are not to be gratified.

Even when the Spouse Himself requires the soul to arise, and seems to expect of her things incompatible with her vows, the soul must consider well how she can comply with His demands; yet still not again take to herself the garment she has just put off, or defile the feet she has washed. It sometimes does happen that He who has called a soul to the quiet of the cloister expects of her, for the good of others, something that interferes with that quiet. Such behests of her Lord are, however, not to be undertaken rashly and inconsiderately; but, as it were, reluctantly. Even when the Spouse knocks Himself, and He Who has called to seclusion demands activity, He, Who is Master of all, is to be met by the soul with this voice, complying, yet more ready to withdraw: "I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on again? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?"

XXXIII.

I sat under His Shadow.

"I sat under His shadow, Whom I had desired, and His fruit was sweet to my palate."

THESE sentiments, my dear Sister, of the Spouse of the Canticles, ought to be your sentiments from this day forward. For, by your now presenting yourself before us, you proclaim, in the presence of the assembled Sisters, the longing desire of your heart to sit under the shadow of the heavenly Bridegroom, and to eat of that fruit which is so sweet to the palate.

To-day you enter into a settled state, a state of rest, signified by "sitting under His shadow." You enter this day the ante-room of your eternity. Your eternity is begun for you—as far as it can be begun upon earth—this day. In your mind there must be no indecision—no wavering—no fluctuation. For, although there is always the possibility of future instability, your mind, at this time, should be firmly fixed, so that when you have put off the trappings of the world, and have taken in their stead the sacred habit of Religion, you may say with the holy Spouse, "I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on again? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?" If such is the disposition of your heart and mind, you will at once feel that delight and consolation, that rest and peace usually experienced by those who enter the holy state of Religion, and ex-

pressed by the words, "I sat under His shadow, Whom I had desired, and His fruit was sweet to my palate."

"I sat under His shadow, Whom I had desired." Whence comes this desire? Has it any natural cause? or from whence is its origin? It is the Bridegroom's call. It is He, under Whose shadow the soul longs to sit, that alone can implant this desire. It has its root in that inmost sanctuary of our being, which no one can reach but Himself, which no other can penetrate. He gives this desire when, and how, and to whom He wills. In some He grafts it in in their earliest infantile years, as if jealous lest any other rival love should steal away a part of His treasure. These seem born to be His. Their childish mind just opening, and hardly knowing its own reasons, they feel that they must be His entirely, His alone. No other thing can satisfy them. When the world afterwards thrusts itself before their notice, they hardly cast towards it a careless glance, so all-absorbed and preoccupied are they with His love, which alone fills their hearts to the exclusion of everything else.

It is not so with all. To others He comes in later age; just at that age when his rival appears so formidable, so all-powerful; when the world is fresh, and is so captivating to the heart, with its gilded fascinations. But He comes, the holy Bridegroom of the soul—the King in His eternal beauty. He casts on them a glance—on them, the elect of the elect; and at the brightness of His Presence the stars go out, and all earth's splendours pale and fade away; and the freshest things

wither up and become an affliction and weariness of the spirit. His glance has kindled a fire within that can never go out any more, has left a wound no art can heal. They are not aware at first of the depth of this wound; nor of its wholly incurable nature. Many times it is scarcely discernible, hardly felt. All goes on the same as before, and it would appear almost an illusion of the mind, or an unfeeling trick of the arch-enemy of mankind. But, from time to time, there is a flash of a sudden light within the soul which reveals its presence, marked and distinct. And this light rouses up at once the dying embers into burning flames. What is it that has taken hold of them? A nameless aching dissatisfaction, which they cannot describe, and of which they hardly know the nature, yet which is consuming their very life away. What is that power, drawing them as it were almost by compulsion out of themselves? It is the holy Bridegroom inviting them to come and sit under His shadow, and to take of that fruit which is so sweet to the palate.

There is no room at last for any more doubtfulness on the matter. Clearer and clearer all becomes. There can be no mistake. Then comes the conflict; on the one side a vehement, burning desire; on the other, oh, what fears, strange fears, passing through the soul, like the scorching wind of the desert, withering her up with its searching blast! If she consent, what pain, what anguish, is in store for herself and for others. If she consent not, there lies before her a hopeless blank of misery and discontent. Many times she would have

slipped away and gone back, but He, the great Bridegroom of souls, would not let her. On the point often of proving false to His inspirations, of casting herself away in reckless despair into the arms of a world she despised, He would not let her, but held her to Him almost in spite of herself. It is over now. Pain there may be, but there is no going back. All is settled, steadfast, and plain.

There are others to whom the heavenly Bridegroom comes even after they have closed with the world. But He has first to harrow up the hard nature of their souls with keen disappointments, slaying their fondest hopes, and cutting deep into their breasts with His cross. Then only can He hope that the desire He implants within them can have upon them the effect He intends.

Of these three classes which are the most favoured? God only knows. For there are first which shall be last, and there are last which shall be first. But of whichever class they may be, they who have received and obeyed the invitation of the Bridegroom of their souls, when at last their desires find their accomplishment, they each and all say, with heartfelt satisfaction, "I sat under His shadow, Whom I had desired, and His fruit was sweet to my palate."

We can never be fully satisfied in this world, but at least it is a great thing to have the refreshment of His shadow. All have not this refreshment, at least not in the same way as those who have embraced the sacred state of Religious life. This, indeed, is what the soul feels,

and is a thing which greatly enhances the preciousness of the blessing she enjoys. Her eye wanders over the world without, and she says, "Why is it that God has chosen me, whilst so many better and more worthy than I are left to hapless wanderings amongst the scorching sands of the desert of the world. They search in vain amidst the burning heat for a happiness they will never find. And behold me sitting in sweet refreshment under the shadow of Him, Whom I had desired. It was not always so. I was once one of those wanderers. I also preferred a fruitless toil to the shadow of the Beloved. Oh, how different is the experience of what I now have from the tasteless joys of former years. What strange delusion was it that prevented me from at once yielding to so blessed an invitation. At last, wearied out by importunity, I consented, fearing, yet desiring, to be His; and what joy, what gladness, what freedom of heart, when I sat under His shadow, Whom I had desired, and tasted His fruit so sweet to my palate!

This, then, is to be your experience. May He Who has begun the good work in you perfect it unto the day of Jesus Christ.

XXXIV.

Religious Profession.

"I to my Beloved, and His turning is towards me."

ON this day, my dear Sister, the Blessed Virgin Mary presented herself to God in the Temple. You are, after her example, about to do the same by an irrevocable vow. As she said, so may you say, "I to my Beloved." Now I am to belong to Him entirely.

What a day this is in your soul's history! What a number of varied graces have been bestowed on you during your past life—all of them, in the great design of God, converging to this point. When you had no suspicion of what He was about, He was strewing your path with circumstances, and filling your soul with lights and graces, which had all for their object the great event of this day.

There are periods in the life of each one at which what has been in preparation for long years reaches at last its climax. The result then attained is the culminating point of all that has gone before—the starting point of a new life. Such a crisis have you arrived at this day. How important for you well to acquit yourself of what you are now about to do. Thereby you put a seal upon the past, and prepare yourself for what is to come. This cannot be better done than by an entire oblation of yourself to your Lord and Saviour Jesus

Christ, couched in the words of the Spouse, "I to my Beloved." Yet when you do this, when you make this oblation, are you giving to Him anything which does not already belong to Him? You are not. It was by Him you were drawn out of nothing, and were presented with that existence you hold at His pleasure. However, being gifted with free will, you could, in a certain manner, withhold from Him what of right belongs to Him, for He has given you the dread power of refusing to be His. But you have no desire to extricate yourself out of His hands; rather you wish to belong wholly to Him, that He may do with you just whatever He wills. This is a blessed conclusion to have reached. It offers bright prospects for the future, for it is, unfortunately, through the want of this entire resignation and surrender of ourselves that our happiness is too often marred, and we become like a broken pillar, a wreck, and a ruin.

God, in bringing each one of us into this world, had His own separate design for every individual soul. He does not look at humanity in mass, but at each one of mankind singly and separately. He clearly distinguishes every soul of the race of Adam, and He has a distinct plan and design for every separate one. There are in the possibilities of God's creation unnumbered multitudes of souls which He might have brought into being, but never did, and never will. Each of those which He has actually created embodies a certain distinct idea of the Divine Mind. Its type pre-existed there with Him before it came itself into being. God determined that it

should not merely exist in possibility, but should have an actual existence. It was made for a certain end and purpose. It was endued with certain capabilities of sanctity and perfection. God prepares for each soul the means of reaching to the full that type of spiritual beauty to which it is His divine intention it should attain.

It depends, however, upon ourselves, each one individually, whether we fall short of it, or fully accomplish it; whether by faithlessness we thwart the love and merciful designs of our Creator towards us, or whether we delight Him by their fulfilment. We shall attain or fail of this end, in proportion as we abandon ourselves more or less completely to the hands of His guiding love. This carrying out of the scope, for which you were created, ought to be one of the motives of the surrender of yourself into the hands of Jesus Christ this day: "I to my Beloved." It is not only the future you should look to, but also the past. You should promise to be faithful by His grace for the future; but you should equally look to retrieve all infidelities of the past. Look over the years gone by, and consider whether, if only you had been faithful to grace received, your soul would not have been in a very much higher degree perfect than you find it at this day. The graces that have been squandered away He will restore to you, if only you come to Him with a complete offering of yourself. This He promises in the mystical language of the Prophet Joel: "I will restore to you the years which the locust hath eaten, the bruchus, the mildew, and

the palmer-worm." If your heart be perfect with Him, He will put you in such a state to-day, as that you shall receive the same grace as you would have done had you never in the least swerved from that singleness of intention with which all ought to follow out His holy Will. You will be able to reach that same glorious height of perfection which He intended in His primary design should be your lot. All short-comings, all backslidings shall be fully blotted out. How earnestly then, in order to secure so great a gift, ought you to cry out from the bottom of your heart, "I to my Beloved."

2. It is a hard thing to do this well. How many use these words and consider very little what they involve. How common it is for persons to feed themselves intellectually with high-souled sentiments, while at the same time their lives run in an altogether counter-direction to their speculative thought. Even when we are in good earnest, our conceptions often dip but a very short way down into the profound deep of those grand expressions which we accustom our lips to utter. How the sword of God pierces to the quick, when we begin to discern something of what is involved in words we have so many times used without ever going below the surface.

You have already offered yourself to God without reserve a thousand times, but what did you mean by it? Not what you mean now.

Now you have at least begun to feel that God may take you at your word, and may exact of you many things very contrary to flesh and blood, and natural desire and

disposition. That crown of thorns which, now more than two years ago, you had given you to wear in exchange for one of flowers, was no unmeaning symbol. It told you that if you belonged to Christ it must be at the price of suffering. You did not expect to be without your cross, but you never thought how deeply it would plough its furrows in the tender marrow of your soul.

Now, however, you are better prepared. You are like a soldier that has seen the battle, yet you still come forward. You do not shrink from the fight. Having counted the cost, you still say, "We are able." May God accept the offering at your hands. "I to my Beloved," whole and entire, living or dying, in prosperity or adversity, in health or in sickness, in light or darkness, in honour or dishonour, in evil report or good report, in fulness or in want, in pain or in delight, equally at all times and in all circumstances His, and caring for nothing but to be His, willing to let all else take its chance.

It is good if such be the temper of your soul, if you can *so* say, "I to my Beloved." And if you *can* so say it, then you may add, "And His turning is towards me." By this expression, "His turning is towards me," is signified that when a soul opens itself fully, and surrenders itself wholly to the influences of Jesus Christ, then He on His part turns to her with great satisfaction, regarding her with intense complacency and delight. This complacency of His in her is also in ordinary cases made known to the soul by an internal

impression, and she becomes in a manner conscious that the eye of her Lord is so directed towards her. What a stay and support is thus given her, in all those manifold trials with which her road is necessarily strewn. And our Lord often, indeed, deprives the soul of all intermediate succour, not allowing any solace to come to her, even from those quarters from whence she justly might have expected aid, in order to keep her closer to Himself. For He would show her that, in the utter want of all other help, He alone is amply sufficient for all her needs. She has only sincerely to say, "I to my Beloved," and she will be able, with great trust and thankfulness of heart, to add, "And His turning is towards me."

3. This turning of our Lord to the soul that has put herself into His hands is no empty favour. Having obtained a complete possession of such souls, He takes a great delight and satisfaction in bringing their powers to perfection. As a king takes delight in adorning the cities of those who have of themselves given their states to his dominion, so is it with our Lord and those souls that put themselves into His hands. He makes His royal entry, bringing with Him innumerable gifts and graces, with which to beautify His newly acquired possession. He is lavish of His presents, and makes their cause His own. He tells them how, in return for their allegiance, He will Himself stand by them, and defend them in every danger they may encounter. He repairs by His merits the losses they have suffered through the infidelities of past years.

He renders their virtues full and mature where He finds them defective. He fills them with many new graces they never before experienced. He gives also light to their eyes to behold something of His own hidden purpose in bestowing life and being upon them. He inspires them with earnest effort to fulfil the scope of which He has made them capable. His eyes are to be seen ever bent with intent watchfulness on the progress they make in that work which is His as well as theirs. He bears His share, and more than His share, in the strain, when their own strength is unequal to the burden they have to carry. He is not a hard Master. He makes great allowances when even that is done which does not please Him. Sometimes He reproaches, and sometimes He comforts, and sometimes He rouses from inaction. But He is always by, never withdrawing to any great distance. Thus He is the soul's light and joy, and without Him she would quite fail and faint away. In such wise He leads His chosen from virtue to virtue, either setting them in a position of usefulness, or reserving all their faculties for Himself alone, just as His designs may be. It is enough for them to know that they are His, and His turning is towards them. Clearing yourself, therefore, from every entanglement, of whatsoever sort or kind, come forward that you may be bound to Him, from Whom you never desire to be loosed any more. Again, for the last time, examine your offering. See that it is clean and free from all that might mar its perfect acceptance.

Then receive from the hands of Jesus Christ the ring

by which He binds you to fidelity ; the gold of which—the purest of all metals—signifies the love He expects of you, and the unending circle of which tells you that you must be His for ever and for ever. Let the sight of this ring ever remind you of your engagement, and its motto be a secret watchword of love between you and the heavenly Bridegroom.

And you, my Sisters, who have already made these vows, renew them on this occasion, and ask of God the grace to be more faithful than ever before.

For those who have not as yet been admitted, let them long for the time when it shall be allowed them also to share in the fulness of this cry of their hearts,—“ I to my Beloved, and His turning is towards me.”

XXXV.

S. Lawrence.

“Thou hast tried me by fire, and iniquity has not been found in me.”

THESE words come from one of the Psalms especially chosen for S. Lawrence's Festival. It is because that form of martyrdom by which he gave testimony of his love for Jesus Christ is set forth by them. *He* was tried by fire. His body was stretched upon a gridiron, under which hot burning embers were placed, that it might be proved if his constancy were so firm, so enduring, as his words would make believe. He stood

the test, and, as his life ebbed away, could say to God, "Indeed Thou hast tried me by fire, but iniquity was not found in me."

S. Lawrence is no ordinary Saint. For as one star excels another star in glory, so is it with the merits of the Saints. All are not equal. There are certain of the Saints who, in the history of the Church, stand out in a marked manner, holy above the holy, great above the great. There is about them a certain supereminent grandeur which at once distinguishes them high above the rest, while it captivates our attention and ravishes our wondering gaze. They are to us types of the other Saints, who in some measure came near them but never equalled them. Theirs is a glory which stands alone. In their brighter light is swallowed up the milder radiance of the others, or rather in their persons we honour and worship the lesser sanctity of those chosen ones of God who were like to them, but with an inferior beauty.

Such is S. Agnes amongst the virgins. Has not Christ had many virgins who have endured torments, yea, and death itself, to keep their maiden whiteness undefiled? He has indeed; yet none stands out before us like S. Agnes. She has printed her figure upon the eyes of our mind, and left there an indelible impress of her form, in a manner wholly different from that of the rest of the virgins of Christ. She is to us the model of virginal purity, whiter than the lilies, having a sheen more dazzling than the lustre of the sun. She is virginity personified; virginity, that is, consecrated to Christ. The

preservation for Christ of her unstained purity is for her an absorbing passion, an enthusiasm which eats up all else. Her unsullied mind reflects Him alone, and has no place for other images. Her thought distils naturally in the conception of herself as His bride; the dress with which He has clothed her; the jewels with which He has adorned her; the exceeding loveliness of her great and glorious Bridegroom. The words that drop from her lips are no forced utterances, but the ingenuous outpourings of a mind lost in His contemplation.

Agnes is the virgin of virgins; the mouthpiece of their sentiments, the leader of the band. The others recognise themselves in her mirror, less beautiful than she, but having the same voice, the same features. She is what they are, only more heroic; her comeliness more exalted, her symmetry more perfect. She breathes the same strains as they do, but with a sweeter melodiousness, a loftier dignity.

That place which S. Agnes holds amongst the virgins of Christ is held amongst the apostles to heathen countries by S. Francis Xavier. His name has become an emblematical expression for missionary fervour. A Xavier is one who has been sent for conversion to Christ of some heathen flock. In a similar way, the symbol for youth sanctified is S. Aloysius Gonzaga; none of his compeers, and he had several, equally satisfy our exacting eyes, looking for the fulness of the beauty of a holy youth.

There has now been enough said to explain in what

way S. Lawrence stands related to the rest of the army of martyrs. They find in him their completed form. Through him they speak to us and claim our homage. They glorify Christ through him, and we in his person sum up all the splendid achievements of the rest of the martyr-choir. Many of the martyrs may have endured more torments than had to be borne by S. Lawrence, but none is to be found equalling the expression of the martyr spirit. It is in this that he stands so sublimely elevated above his fellows. This gives him his supereminent dignity. If we wish to know their sentiments, they point to him, and he makes answer for them. That martyr spirit which breathed in them all reached its full climax in him. He is the culminating expression of its vehement fervour. Thus that multitude of martyrs, whose names have slipped away out of the memory of mankind, still live in him. They speak to God and to men through him. His beautiful figure stands in the front to catch the eye, but they are present with him though half-hidden by a veil of obscurity. His glory is their glory also ; for his glory is not so much personal, but is a glory given to the martyrs of Christ. It is them he represents when he stands before us.

Such, then, is S. Lawrence, and none else could worthily fill his place. God made him for it. That radiant halo which plays round the forms of the rest is nothing when compared with his light,—its lustre is gone. In his sweetness and in his majesty he has no fellow ; none can come near him.

S. Lawrence's Day is kept with an octave and a vigil ; this vigil was in old times a fasting day. It has been the custom of the Church only to usher in her principal festivals in such a manner ; so that the honour done to S. Lawrence is a high one. His thirst for martyrdom, expressed in such simple, earnest phrase, could not but ever win for him the love of all Christian hearts. You know his story. He was the principal deacon of the seven deacons of Rome, and so waited continually on the Pope Sixtus when he celebrated the Holy Sacrifice. When, therefore that holy old man was being led out to martyrdom, the Blessed Lawrence cried, to him, "Whither goest thou, O Father, without thy son ? Whither wendest thou, O priest, without thy deacon ? Thou wast never wont to offer sacrifice without thy minister. Make trial now if thou hast chosen a fitting person to dispense the Blood of the Lord." Such was his language of complaint, as though this holy pope had thought him unworthy to be the sharer of his martyrdom."

But S. Sixtus comforted him presently by saying, "It is not so, my son ; but we, as being old, are led by an easier path. For thee there remain greater conflicts. In three days thou shalt follow me." It was as the holy pope had foretold. S. Lawrence being put in prison, was on the third day led out to die—not an easy death, not a death in one short stroke, but a lingering death, and one of great torture. He was fastened to a large gridiron, and hot coals of fire were placed beneath to

roast his flesh alive. But the fire of God's love, which burned strong within, made him to take no heed to the fire without. His countenance betrayed no sign of pain, but with a smiling air he turned to the tyrant Valerian and said, mockingly, "Now turn and eat, if thou wilt, for my flesh is enough roasted."

By this manner of death he gave up his soul to Christ. Faithful to the end, he could say, "Thou hast tried me by fire, and iniquity was not found in me."

It remains now for us to learn the lesson which the Holy Church would teach us by the festival of this glorious Saint. She teaches us what she expects of us, in the collect of the day. In this collect we pray that, as S. Lawrence overcame the flames of torments, so we may extinguish the flames of our vices. That is a thing we cannot expect to do all at once, but we ought never to be content without evidences of a certain progress in one or other direction. We ought to be able to see, from time to time, that some evil habit, to which we formerly yielded, has now no longer the same sway over us; but that, when the temptation comes, we withstand it, and are no longer vanquished. Then we should be able to say to God, with S. Lawrence, "Thou hast tried me by fire, and iniquity has not been found in me."

If, for instance, formerly you gave way to the vice of anger, and when provoked became saddened by passion, you by the grace of God and the prayers of S. Lawrence now must seek to overcome, that the fire of temptation may not kindle this vice in you. We ought not to be con-

tent with a half-victory. Never ought we to rest satisfied till our victory over temptation is complete. When, in the midst of the hot coals of fire, we still preserve an unruffled calm, a heart sweetly undisturbed, then can we say that anger has been vanquished ; then can we cry to God, "Thou hast tried me by fire, and iniquity has not been found in me."

What has been said of the vice of anger may be equally said of every other vice. Each one has his own proper temptation ; one after this manner, another after that. Each is tried in the furnace of temptation, as gold is by the fire. One is tried by the burnings of avarice, another by the stings of concupiscence, another again by the heat of ambition. Only when we succeed in completely out-rooting these vices can we say with S. Lawrence, "Thou hast tried me, O Lord, by fire, and iniquity was not found in me."

Let us not despair, however great be our conflict ; but, by the help of the prayers of this great Saint, let us hope for certain victory.

XXXVI.

S. Agnes.

"Young maidens have loved Thee exceedingly."

PERHAPS the most lovely of all the sweet flowers that Christianity has produced is the lily of virginal chastity. It is for this that the prophet, seeing in vision the effects wrought by the Holy Eucharist, calls it "the corn of the elect and the wine that blossometh virgins." The virginal life, as a state of perpetual vow, was unknown before the time of the Gospel dispensation. Amongst the heathen it is true there were vestal virgins, but they kept themselves as virgins only for a while ; whilst in the Buddhist Monasteries no vows at all are made. The Jewish maidens, from the very hope of being ancestors of the Messias, held in horror the barrenness of the virgin state. It seems a very strange expression to Christian ears, that the grand sorrow of Jephtha's daughter was the "bemoaning of her virginity;" old things are so passed away, and all things are become new. This change was wrought by Christ our Lord. He Himself, and His Mother also, would lead no other kind of life than that of virgins. He chose also, as His forerunner, one who should ever remain a virgin. His beloved disciple was also a virgin. His discourses exalt on high the praises of virginity ; so that, had He not, by His presence at a marriage feast, directly sanctioned this state as holy, men might almost have doubted if it were not

something sinful to marry. Such doubts S. Paul clears up by saying plainly that it is not a sin to marry, though such as marry shall have trouble in the flesh, and the virginal state is to be preferred. It is to be preferred, not only as above that which is bad, but as above that which is lawful and good. Good things require generally the contrast with what is bad, to make their virtue appear. But virginal chastity requires not this set off; for, even when contrasted with that which is good, its pre-eminent excellence still shines forth, bright and clear, showing "how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory."

No more wonderful example of this virtue has ever appeared in the Church than that of the Blessed Agnes. She was indeed both virgin and martyr; but it is not her martyrdom which catches the eye. That is almost forgotten. Its glory is shrouded, swallowed up by the transcendent brightness of her virginal purity. This halo, with its streams of splendour, blinds the sight, and stops all further consideration. It fills up all the view. Her martyrdom is but one of the effects of the steadfastness of her virginity, a flower growing upon its stalk, an overflowing from its fulness. Virginity thus gathers in the mead of praise not only for its own excellence, but also as having the power and grace to make martyrs.

Many virgins has Holy Church produced, and even many virgin martyrs, yet still, amidst her fellows, S. Agnes stands alone in the peerless beauty of her majestic sweetness. *Non est inventa similis illi.* No one has

been found like to her. As a queen surrounded by her noble, princely maidens, so S. Agnes appears among the virgin company, easily distinguished from the rest by a matchless grace peculiar to herself, unshared by the others, all her own. The Gospel idea of virginal chastity found in her its full and complete expression. When looking at her, we find nothing wanting. She perfectly realises the conception of faith. We are filled to the full and are satisfied. In the choir of Christ's virgins S. Agnes occupies the same place that S. Francis Xavier holds amongst Apostolic Missionaries, or S. Aloysius Gonzaga, as the ideal of saintly youth. They are the chosen models, who have attained each in their own sphere the climax of perfection.

It is a hard task to begin to speak in a fitting manner of such an one as S. Agnes. The words that are recorded as having fallen from her own lips give us the truest idea of what she was. They are words instinct with life, which paint out before our eyes the hidden lineaments of her soul. They give expression to that vital energy, which exercised over her whole spirit such a vehement sway. Her name itself, by a coincidence that seems hardly chance, is a symbol of herself; for "Agna" in Latin signifies "lamb;" whilst in Greek (*ἀγνή*) it means chaste. She was worthy of such a name, being both innocent and pure. The parents of S. Agnes were Christians, so that she was reared from childhood in the simplicity of the faith, and her pure soul drank deep of the well of its sacred teaching. At

twelve years old, an age at which, under the laws of Rome, marriage was allowed to girls, she received the veil, by which she was consecrated, as the spouse of Jesus Christ, to perpetual chastity.

Besides the dowry given her of great beauty, she was rich in this world's wealth, as the only child of patrician parents. She was therefore sought after by many in marriage; but one especially was urgent in his suit, the son of the chief prefect. Amongst other love-tokens this young man came himself one day, bringing some most costly ornaments, such as generally charm the fancy of young maidens. To Agnes it was hateful thus to be sought after by earthly love. To be admired by the eyes of a man was what her whole soul turned away from. In accents, therefore, that revealed the holy anger of her heart, she cried, "Take away these things, and go from me, you that are but the food of death; for another Lover has already won my heart. With Him alone do I keep my faith. To Him I give myself over with entire surrender. In loving Him I shall still be chaste, for His caress is pure, and in taking Him for my Spouse I shall still remain a virgin. Far better ornaments than these has He given me. He has already pledged me with a ring of betrothal. My right hand He has covered with gems, and my neck He has encircled with measureless strings of jewels. He has bestowed on me raiment of wrought gold. In my ears He has set rings of pearls of priceless worth. Besides, He has shown me treasures, whose value cannot be counted, which He

has in store for me, if I only remain faithful to His love. His riches are unfailing, and will never become less. For Himself, His birth is higher and His Countenance fairer than the sons of men. He sprang from a Virgin, and was begotten of His Father without mother. The Angels are His servants, the sun and moon stand dismayed at His beauty. By the smell of His raiment the dead revive again ; by His touch the weak are made strong. Honey and milk are under His tongue. Such is my Beloved, and such is my Friend. To Him I have plighted my troth. For He has crowned me with a wreath of espousals, and has set a sign upon my face, that I may admit no other lover but Himself."

With words of this import did S. Agnes reject the proposals of an earthly marriage. The young man did not understand all that had been said, and falling sick through the denial of his love, his parents again pressed the suit for him. But S. Agnes repeated that she could not break her plighted faith to her first Lover. At length by inquiries the pagan prefect ascertained that she was a Christian, and understood that for Christ's sake, Whom she called her Spouse, she refused to marry. He first, therefore, desired to force her to sacrifice to Vesta, the heathen goddess of chastity. Then, becoming more furious, he declared he would have her chastity defiled, and he ordered her to be conveyed away for this end. But the Angel of God did not abandon her, or suffer the wicked to do her any harm ; so that the den of infamy was converted into a holy sanctuary. Its place is now occupied

by the Church of S. Agnes. Seeing himself powerless against the purity of her virginal state, whether within or without, the prefect gave orders for her instant execution.

No bride ever hastened to her wedding so cheerfully as Agnes made herself ready for the stroke of death. As for the manacles, with which they had attempted to bind her hands, her wrists were too tiny for the smallest of such prison ornaments. She just shook her hands lightly, and they fell clattering on the ground. There she stood, amongst bloodthirsty men, without a sign of fear or a throb of dismay. The headsman sought to allure her to snatch herself from death, but in vain. "Nay," she said, "for a bride to hang back when her Betrothed is calling for her, this were to put a slight upon His love. He Who loved me first, and chose me, shall have me. It is well that this body of mine should perish, which is loved in an evil way by eyes that I would not." Then raising her voice, and looking upwards, she cried, "Behold, now I come to Thee Whom I have sought for, Whom I have desired. Already I see what I have coveted. I now hold what I hoped for. Yes, in heaven I am joined to Him Whom on earth I have loved with entire devotedness. Open wide, O Eternal Ruler, the gates of heaven till lately barred to man. And call to Thyself, O Christ, the soul that cleaveth to Thee, both by virginal consecration and as Thy Father's victim."

Then kneeling down, she drew, with her own hands, her silken hair over her head, and bent her head ready for the blade, looking like a lily in her simple, snow-white

robe. The heart of the rough executioner forsook him.
 He quaked, and trembled, and could not wield his sword.
 She alone seemed well content of all that motley group.
 A moment more, and with one stroke the head is severed
 from the body. Thou art gone, Blessed Agnes ; thou
 art gone to the eternal embrace of thy Spouse ; obtain
 for us some like sentiments to thy own love of chastity.

Deep on the convent roof the snows
 Are sparkling to the moon :
 My breath to heaven, like vapour goes ;
 May my soul follow soon !
 The shadows of the convent towers
 Slant down the snowy sward ;
 Still creeping with the creeping hours,
 That lead me to my Lord.
 Make Thou my spirit pure and clear
 As are the frosty skies,
 Or this first snowdrop of the year,
 That in my bosom lies.

As these white robes are soiled and dark
 To yonder shining ground ;
 As this pale taper's earthly spark
 To yonder argent round ;
 So shows my soul before the Lamb,
 My spirit before Thee ;
 So in my earthly house I am,
 To what I hope to be.
 Break up the heavens, O Lord ! and far
 Through all yon starlight keen,
 Draw me, Thy bride, a glittering star,
 In raiment white and clean.

He lifts me to the golden doors,
 The flashes come and go :
 All heaven bursts her starry floors,
 And strows her light below,--
 And deepens on and up,—the gates
 Roll back, and far within,
 For me the heavenly Bridegroom waits,
 To make me pure from sin :
 The Sabbaths of Eternity,—
 One Sabbath, long and wide :
 A light upon the shining sea ;—
 The Bridegroom and His Bride.—TENNYSON.



OCCASIONAL.

XXXVII.

Br. Mary Aloysius Wragg, Dominican Tertiary, was born July 2nd, Feast of the Visitation, 1859 ; died August 3rd, 1873, the first Vespers of the Feast of S. Dominic, at 7 p.m. ; was buried in the Tertiary habit at Sheepshed, Feast of the Transfiguration, August 6th. On arriving at the churchyard gates, the coffin was carried by six boys, dresses in surplices, into the church. The screws were then taken out, and the children of the school came up, two and two, to take farewell of their saintly companion. It was a touching sight.

Reward of Virgins.

. " *These follow the Lamb, whithersoever He goeth.*"



IN this vale of tears nothing makes upon us so deep an impression as death. Our sympathies are stirred both for the one that is taken from us and for the friends who mourn their loss. We do not rejoice so much with those who rejoice as we are willing to weep with those who weep. We know in ourselves that sorrow unmans us, that in sorrow it is we most need an assisting hand; we feel it therefore an unpardonable thing to pass by grief with a careless eye.

To lose from amongst us one we love is always a saddening thing.—Never again on earth to hear that voice whose tones melted into our very soul. Never to feel the touch of that hand, never to see the kindling beam of those eyes, casting their glance of love upon us. Never to hear the footfall of that step, the sound of which brought comfort in the dreariest hour. All these things past and gone, never again to return.

The loss we ourselves suffer in our bereavement forms but one element of our pain. There is added to it, in many cases, the terrible fear of what may be, or may not be, the fate of the one we have so much loved in the world unseen. Could we but lift the veil and see that all was right there, we might be content; but our eyes cannot pierce through the impenetrable gloom. With all their straining, they cannot reach the further shore. Could we only be certain that our loved one was at peace, we too might cease to indulge a bootless sorrow. Happy are we, therefore, when those whose bodies we lay in the grave have given plain proofs during life of the love they bore to their Lord. Of them we almost hear the words said, "They shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy."

For such we feel we have a surety. They left a track of glowing light on their path, a sort of gage and earnest of the glory they are to receive in their true home. For we know that the day will come when the just shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Each shall shine with its own special glory.

For just as each precious stone has its own peculiar splendour, and that of the sapphire is not like that of the emerald, nor that of the emerald like that of the ruby, so will it be with these heavenly jewels that are found meet to adorn the head of the King of kings. We feel happy to have known such. We feel it a greater thing to have been honoured with the love and esteem of God's chosen ones, than to be the close friends of the great ones of this earth. For what will the great ones of the earth be when the curtain falls, and this short earthly pageant is over? They can take none of their riches, or honours, or dignities, with them when they die. Their pomp, and their pride and splendour, will not follow them there. They will have to come down from their thrones to sit in the dust. The aristocracy of holiness will alone shine there, and exalt its possessors in the kingdom of God.

Have you ever seen a butterfly coming forth to the light out of the dark cell in which it has been confined whilst in the state of the chrysalis? With what ravished delight it spreads forth its painted wings to catch the warm rays of the sun! Those beams cause its whole frame to thrill with delicious rapture. What a gift to it is its newly developed life. The life it had before, when imprisoned, could hardly be called life, but rather a living death, compared with this new freedom. Now, light as air, it is borne from flower to flower, sipping dew and honey, living an unmingled life of joy. Such is a feebly shadowed representation of the life of bliss the

just will enjoy with God. The despised grub will become as the butterfly, but the earthly butterfly will then become but as a grub, honours and dignities and pleasures all at an end.

Oh, what a reversed state of things shall we then behold. Many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first. Many who by their station, their talents, their riches, could have done such grand things for God, shall then be weighed in the balances and be found wanting. There will be no respect of persons there. They will be unceremoniously thrust aside, and their seats at the King's table, to which they could have come with such glory, shall be given instead to the poor, and the mean, and the ignorant, who did the work they with all their wealth of capacities failed to fulfil, who became Saints with far slenderer advantages.

Oh, happy lot of the Saints in bliss ! when shall your joy be ours ? But if all are so happy, how ten times more happy are those who are found worthy to be the favourites of heaven ! All are not equal there, but those are exalted in surpassing joy who have been more faithful and true to the Lamb here on earth, and have offered to Him a perfect life.

"I beheld," says S. John, "and lo ! a Lamb stood upon Mount Zion, and with Him a hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Name and the Name of His Father written on their foreheads. And they sung as it were a new canticle before the throne ; and no man could sing that canticle but those hundred and forty-

four thousand, who were purchased from the earth. These are they who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, and in their mouth was found no lie, for they are without spot before the throne of God."

And "whither," says S. Augustine, "think we this Lamb goeth? Where no one presumeth or is able to follow but this happy company. Whither, think we, doth He go? Into what glades or meadows? where are found joys—not the joys of this world, lying, treacherous, and vain—nor such joys even as shall be to the rest who are not virgins in the kingdom of God; but joys distinct from theirs—joys of the virgins of Christ, in Christ, through Christ, for Christ. The special joys of the virgins of Christ are not the same as the joys of them that are not virgins. Others have their joys, but none such joys. The rest of the faithful that cannot as far as this follow the Lamb shall see you. They shall see, nor shall it be with envious eyes. By rejoicing with you they shall possess in you what they have not in themselves. For that new canticle, which is your own, and belongs to no other, they shall not indeed be able to sing; but to hear it they shall be able, and to be delighted with your so excellent a good. But ye who both sing and hear it—for the song which ye sing ye shall likewise hear as it cometh from you—shall exult with a yet greater bliss, and shall reign with a yet brighter happiness. They, however, shall not have sorrow because of your greater joy."

To this sweet company of singers, that circle round the Lamb, another voice is now added. He whose body we commit this day to the earth, though so young, had made at his own request a vow of chastity, that he might be the Spouse of our Lord. He is gone to sing the song of virgins. Oh, what a song is that! A song such as mortal ear never heard; a song which, in beauty and loveliness, far surpasses even the chant of the bright angels who sung on the hills of Bethlehem, "Glory to God in the highest," on the first Christmas morn; surpasses the sweetest strain of the heavenly harpers, even that of the "Holy, holy, holy," which is sung evermore before the throne of God. Oh, that we may be counted worthy one day, if not to sing, at least to hear it. How shall all heaven listen in silent wonderment to its thrilling beauty? How shall each bosom throb and burn with vehement adoration, pierced to the quick by its transcendent sweetness? Not the voice of Cherubim or Seraphim, or the highest of the angelic powers, can hymn a strain like that, or fully comprehend the divine melody of that song. Who shall be able to compass it? Who shall be able to attain unto it? for it is the song of the Lamb's wife; and no man can learn it, save only the hundred and forty-four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth, and are the first-fruits to God and to the Lamb; and the singers are the blessed virgin company, who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

XXXVIII.

Frances de Lisle (olim Sutton) died at Grâce Dieu, April 28, 1871.

Destiny of the Soul.

"Behold, all souls are Mine."

WE are here to-day to commit to the ground the mortal tenement of one whose soul we trust God has translated to a happier and better country. "All souls," says God, "are Mine;" by which He would have us learn that the soul is His own peculiar possession. The dust of the body returns into its earth, from whence it was, but the spirit returns to God, Who gave it.

When we take a last farewell of the earthly remains of those we love, and the grave closes over them, oh, what a blank, cold chill falls over our own spirits, and makes itself felt within our hearts, penetrating us to the very core. It is as if, indeed, the deathly atmosphere of the tomb had risen up and taken hold of us. They lie there, whom we love, in such terrible silence, and a dead wall of separation rears itself up betwixt us and them. We never knew what the parting was till now. Never in all its fulness did we realise it till this moment. It is therefore at this moment above all others that we have need to temper the surrounding gloom by the remembrance that, though the body is returned to its mother-earth, the soul still lives on, and is in the hand of God's Providence,—is still His own peculiar possession, according to the

words, "Behold, all souls are Mine." It is still the special object of His love and care. He addresses it as it enters its new state of being, with the Prophet, "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name: thou art Mine. When thou shalt pass through the waters I will be with thee, and the rivers shall not cover thee."

"All souls are Mine," says God. The soul has the origin of its being from God. It comes into existence by an act of His creative power and Will. God alone is its Father. He, independently of man, is the Author from Whom it proceeds. He has a just claim therefore upon it, and may with good right say, "All souls are Mine." God is the Alpha and Omega of the soul, its primary cause and its last end. As He is its fountain and spring, so is He the term to which it naturally tends.

It is the soul which is God's rather than the body, for the soul it is which has in it the principle of an immaterial life, the union of which with the dust of earth lies only in the reach of God, and is altogether above man's sphere. It is the soul God takes to Himself at death, whilst He leaves the body in the hands of men. He takes the gem and leaves the casket behind. He takes the spiritual treasure and there remains only the earthly envelope—a splendid edifice, but abandoned and deserted, soon to moulder and decay. Yet we may not question His right. He took what He alone could give. He took back that to which He had never surrendered His claim. All souls are His.

God withdraws the soul at such a time as He sees good, some at one period of life, some at another. The fitness of the time does not always square with the notions of men, but is justified clearly by the laws of unerring wisdom and love. The sending of each soul into this world is no chance matter, nor is its withdrawal, but all is done with a fixed aim and purpose.

God has a far deeper interest in each one of us, in each separate soul, than have our dearest and most devoted friends. He can say of every individual of the human family, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." From all eternity there dwelt in His Divine Mind the type and idea after which every soul that He has ever formed, or ever will form, was to be fashioned. There was with Him a distinct apprehension of its peculiar spiritual grace, which caused Him to take pleasure in the contemplation of its beauty, and to determine to give to His idea an actual embodiment. To each soul that is brought into this world there are capacities given to attain the fulness of that standard of excellence to which the Divine love and mercy has designed that it should reach. In the many mansions of His kingdom in heaven He has for each a glory prepared, which the soul that has corresponded to His designs shall enjoy.

In order that the soul may not fall short of the intentions of His love He spares no pains, no cost. Not to speak of the sacraments of Salvation by which He first imparts to the soul the life of His own Son, and the Redemption, wrought through the shedding of His sacred

Blood, He ordains also for this predestined end all those things which we are apt to imagine the chance circumstances of our lot. All those things are managed, each one separately, by an all-controlling Providence, for the furtherance of His grand design, for the salvation and sanctification of the soul He loves. When the soul through the weary weight of the fleshly burden draws back, He is at hand with His counsel and strength. And sometimes He threatens ; sometimes He consoles ; sometimes He unsparingly urges to the completion of the task ; sometimes He steps in as it were to lend His own hand to support us, and to relieve us of a part of the strain of the burthen. From time to time He repairs the losses we have sustained, out of the fund of redeeming love, through the sacraments of His grace. Thus through cold and heat, in slow journeys, or forced marches, in much painfulness, as well as by consolations, He brings the soul onward to the desired term. And when that is reached of which He sees us capable, or which fits in with His own preconceived idea of the measure of our everlasting bliss, He cuts the thread of life, and we fall into His hands, to be, if necessary, perfectly matured by the discipline of the world of spirits, for the eternal enjoyment of His Presence.

In the realms above there is an infinite variety of souls, each differing in some respect from all others, as one star differeth from another star in glory. Each of these souls has its particular office in the divine economy, which no other is equally able to fulfil. Each is the enshrinement

of an idea of the Divine Mind, and is perfect in its kind. He looks upon them all, and pronounces them to be very good. All are beautiful and glorious, and the very least has a dazzling splendour that would put to shame all the best sheen of earthly glory.

Amongst this company we justly hope and believe that she who has passed away from amongst us, has found, or is soon to find, a place. It is not pretended that any lofty throne on the right or left hand of the Saviour is prepared for her. Each one will have that place for which God knows he is fitted, and which he himself likewise will feel to be his proper everlasting abode.

In the estimation, however, of the worth of the soul a great deal has to be left out of the calculation, which here below is reckoned to be of great price. In the estimation of the world a man's value is proportioned to the grandeur or usefulness of his career in the passing things of this life. A man who has made his name famous by some wonderful discovery of science is thought not to have run his course in vain. One who has been a great statesman, a great general, or has otherwise filled, with éclat and renown, some position of importance, such an one is esteemed to be really great. But all these things, position and rank, usefulness of a man's career, high talents, and even what the world terms noble manliness of character, are of little price in the sight of God.

Persons of a worldly mind are apt to contrast in this matter the character of Esau with that of Jacob. Esau,

hot and impulsive, but forgiving and generous, appears in their eyes in a favourable light. Jacob, on the contrary, whose faults stand out clear and plain, makes but a mean and pitiful show by the side of his brother. But in the judgment of God, Esau is the type of the profane reprobate, and Jacob, with all his faults, the type of the elect. God's thoughts are not as our thoughts. It is not those virtues or excellencies which make so brave a show with the world that God especially prizes. The graces He loves are to be found often in characters which the world makes no account of. What He looks for in the souls that are His, is that they be little in their own eyes, and esteem others better than themselves, that they be unworldly, simple, guileless, and pure in heart. This childlike innocence of spirit is the thing that specially fits them for an entrance into His kingdom, according to the words, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." This guilelessness serves them instead of a more educated prudence, to screen them from the ways of sin. So they keep their garments clean; and our Lord says of such, "They shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy."

It was such virtues as these she possessed whose soul has been so early taken away from our midst. So clean was her conscience from wilful guilt, that when preparing for the sacraments her difficulty was not in confessing the burden of sin, but in finding out anything of which she might accuse herself. Doubtless she had

her faults, but they were rather deficiencies of natural disposition than sins.

Her simplicity, patience, obedience, and submission to the Will of God in her last sickness were such as quite to excite the admiration of all who had to wait on her. It is true that sometimes the pain was so great that it would force cries of anguish from her, but not a murmur of impatience ever crossed her lips. And though she was told there was every likelihood of her getting well and of her living yet many happy years, she never seemed to desire it, but only assented to the thought when suggested to her, with the addition, "If it be the Will of God."

Thus crucified in body and will, patience had her perfect work, and with all those manifold helps which the Catholic Church knows how to afford, she passed away in peace to her God, her body waiting its resurrection-day, whilst the soul flies upwards.

"All souls are Mine." God takes back what belongs to Him. She is now His entirely. Yes ; there is one soul more gone to throng the full courts of heaven ; one soul more to swell with her voice the anthems of the blessed. Another jewel more added to the Redeemer's crown. One soul more washed in His Blood, to praise Him day and night in His temple. One more to take her place in the bright company that circles round His throne. One more escaped from the dark prison of the body, and gone to enjoy the living light of God. One more soul set free from the clogging weight of the flesh to wing its flight above the stars. One soul more released

from the miseries of this land of exile and gone to that happy home where God wipes away every tear from every eye, and there is no more crying, nor mourning, nor sorrow, but the weary are at rest; and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.

XXXIX.

Mary de Lisle died at Garendon, October, 1860, aged seventeen years.

Christian Sorrow for the Dead.

"And when Job heard this he arose and rent his garments, and said, The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord!"

IN these words we find expressed the measure of a Christian's sorrow for the departed. Holy Job, instructed by the Spirit of God, had the understanding of what a Christian should do, even before the Christian dispensation had been unfolded.

God has not forbidden us to sorrow, if our sorrow be within the bounds He has fixed for it. Did not David sorrow over his friend Jonathan? "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan, exceeding amiable to me; above the love of women. As a mother loveth her only son, so did I love thee." And so again at the death of his son Absalom, we are told that he went up to his chamber, weeping as he went, and saying, "O Absalom,

my son, would to God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom !” And under the New Testament it is the same thing, so that we find our Lord Himself weeping at the grave of His friend Lazarus.

So likewise S. Paul does not forbid us to sorrow, but only forbids that we should sorrow as others who have no hope. Indeed, we learn from his own example, that he himself was affected as we are, for when one of his dear friends was restored after being sick, he says, “The Lord had mercy on him, and not on him only ; but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.”

We may then sorrow for her who is gone, though we have a well-grounded hope that she is gone to a place where she will be far happier. How true of her are those words of the Prophet Jeremias, “Her sun went down while it was yet day ;” nay, not only whilst it was yet day, but as it were in the very morning, before the brightness and clear light of noonday had come. “She came up, and was cut down like a flower.”

It would seem as though God chose her as a fair flower, and took her away from the earth to plant her in the garden of His Paradise, out of the reach now of the rude blasts of wind, or of the sun’s scorching heat, or winter’s cold, “lest malice and wickedness should change her understanding, or deceit beguile her soul.”

For though sometimes God cuts down the young because of their sinfulness, yet at other times it is His token of love towards them. The ways of God are inscrutable. We cannot tell why one is taken

and another left. We cannot fathom the counsels of the All-Wise. And in our afflictions we ought always to have this fact before our view. For we must all be visited, one way or other, by afflictions similar to that which we to-day lament.

And it is the more necessary that we should know how to meet them ; how to act under them. Job's case is a type of ours, his behaviour is an example for us to follow. The loss of his cattle and all his worldly goods he could bear ; but when it came to his children, his strong heart could endure it no longer without giving vent to the agony of his grief. He rose up and rent his garments ; and having shaven his head, he cast himself on the ground and said, " Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked I shall return thither." But his grief carried him no further : no murmur, no complaint, no sound of discontent came forth out of his lips. His refuge lay in his acknowledgment that the counsels of the All-Wise are unfathomable. He knew that nothing could have happened to him except either by the Will, or the permission of God ; and though he was himself ignorant of the reason why God had so dealt with him, yet he knew there *was* a reason, and that it must be just and right.

We can never tell for certain why it is that God sends afflictions. Sometimes it is in order to arrest us in a course of sin, or in punishment for some sin of which we have been guilty. And here this holy man, though conscious of failings, could find no reason in his conduct why God had let fall upon him so heavily the rod of His

chastisement. He had been in fear, as he himself tells us, concerning all his works, knowing that God will not spare the sinner.

Another reason why God chastises, is lest we should be serving Him from mercenary motives, having respect principally, or overmuch, to the temporal blessings which may be expected for so doing. And this motive we find Satan himself imputed ignorantly to Job, when he said, "Doth Job serve God in vain? Hast Thou not put a hedge round him in blessing all that he hath? Put forth Thy hand and touch him, and he will curse Thee to Thy face." So thought Satan. And had Job burst out into complaint and murmuring against God, when tried by affliction, this accusation would have been true. Had he said, "To what purpose have I walked blameless before the Lord, and washed mine hands in innocency, when behold, for my good deeds I receive an evil reward, and there is no remembrance of them in His sight?"—had he done so, then Satan would have gained the victory; but the Lord had already pronounced Job perfect; He suffered the trial of this holy man in order to add to his merits. Thus this blessed man, whose virtues were already so great, was cast into the crucible, that it might be made evident that there was no dross in him; but that he was indeed like silver purified seven times in the fire.

The afflictions which he endured added but to the brightness of his crown, and procured for it the addition of many inestimable jewels, according to the saying of

the Apostle, "The light affliction of this present time procureth for us a far more exceeding and superabundant weight of glory." Let us stand still then for a while, whilst we gaze with wonder and admiration at the grand sanctity of this blessed man : whom nothing daunted, the nobleness of whose soul the sevenfold-heated furnace proved only to be free from dross, who staggered not through unbelief ; but whose fortitude stood firm and erect amid the crash of all his fondest hopes. Let us admire the height of stature to which he attained, with neither the pattern of Christ to grow up to, nor the particular graces of the Gospel to assist him, nor the help of the written law to instruct him.

For not after he had endured the affliction some time did he arrive at resignation of spirit by degrees ; but, leaping over all boundary, he at the very outset arrived at the goal, and whilst he was yet stunned with the blow, yea, with blow upon blow ; whilst his heart was yet bleeding with wounds all fresh, with none to comfort his aching soul, or to lift him up with support, or to cheer him on in the right path, he yet kept himself from swerving in the least from the rectitude of God's service. He looked up out of the abyss of his ignorance, and adored the hand of Him who struck the blow—the Almighty, the All-Wise. He was in utter darkness as to why it had pleased Him so to do. Enveloped and lost in the obscurity, he knew nothing else but that God had done it. This knowledge sufficed. It was rest and repose for him at this trying moment. He could still

bless God, for he acquiesced fully in the counsels of the Divine Mind, though utterly unable at the time to fathom them. His great mind submitted itself, and by this act of submission was the greatness of his mind shown forth. An intellect less illuminated would not have discerned so clearly the Almighty hand in the events that had come to pass. A will less conformed to that of God would have failed under the trial.

However, it is assuredly less difficult to endure the loss of those we love when at their passage from earth they left a bright track behind them. So was it with her who has been removed from us. Death seemed to have no terrors for her candid, simple soul. With a clear, intelligent faith she prepared herself by the reception of the sacraments of religion, her faculties being unclouded to the very end, her last words a prayer. Nay, it is said that on the night of her departure sounds of heavenly music were heard resounding from her chamber, as if the blessed Angels had come to escort her away.* We may pray then that, if she is not yet in perfect bliss, she may soon so be, purged from all stain; but what room is there for sorrow here? Rather in this case we ought to hearken to the words of Job: "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord."

* Four men, Protestants, one of whom has since become a Catholic, declared they heard from the chamber of the dying girl, on the night she passed away, the most beautiful sacred chant. A few days before her death she woke up with the words, "Oh mamma, I thought I saw Angels floating into the room!"

XL.

The Four Gospels.

"The first living creature was like a lion, and the second like a calf; the third having the face, as it were, of a man, and the fourth like an eagle flying."

THE four living creatures seen by S. John in his apocalyptic vision have ever been taken in the Church to be symbolic representations of the four Evangelists. These same emblems were seen by Ezekiel in his vision of the Cherubim, though not after exactly the same manner. According to Jewish tradition, the four camps in the desert of Sinai had on their banners these same figures. Judah had a lion, Ephraim an ox, Reuben a man, and Dan an eagle. As emblems of the four Gospels, they mark out how each Evangelist, in his portraiture of the same Christ, seizes upon and brings out forcibly some particular aspect of Him. The prominent painting, however, of each one's favourite characteristic does not exclude in any case the other features of the Christ. The same form is to be recognised in all the Gospels, the same features; one feature coming out more markedly in one Gospel, and another in another; but all to be found in a measure in each, just as in Ezekiel's vision of the living creatures all the four had the faces of a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle. The one river that came out of the garden of pleasure is thus divided into four heads. The import of the emblems is as follows.

The lion, as king of beasts, imports sovereignty. In this sense the young lion is used for a prince in the nineteenth chapter of Ezekiel. In the same sense are the words spoken, "The lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David;" because the sceptre belonged to Judah, and the kingdom to David.

The eye of S. Matthew, an official of the vast Roman Empire, naturally turns to the contemplation of this phase of the character of the Messias. His Gospel opens with, "The generation of Jesus Christ the son of *David*, the son of Abraham." The prophecy of Isaias, when the *kingdom* seemed in danger of extinction, is related to show its foretold revival. The Magi came seeking "One who is born *King* of the Jews." Herod is in alarm at the birth of the Royal Child. The Scribes relate the prophecy of Bethlehem: "Out of thee shall come forth the Captain that shall rule My people Israel." In the following chapter John Baptist preaches, not as in S. Luke, "the baptism of penance," but that the *kingdom* of heaven is at hand. Our Lord Himself orders His disciple to preach of the same kingdom. In this Gospel our Lord, in the sermon on the Mount, gives the new law as Ruler. In two of the beatitudes the kingdom is mentioned. There is a tone of authority in the expression, "But I say unto you."

In parables which have an analogy to, or are the same with, those of S. Luke, instead of the words, "A certain man," here it is said, "A certain king," "The lord of the vineyard," "The master of the house," etc., all betokening

power and rule. In S. Luke the seed sown is called the "Word of God ;" but in S. Matthew, the "Word of the kingdom." The burden of the parables in S. Matthew is of the kingdom. In no other Gospel is it said, "Then shall the King say to them on His right," or, "The King answering, shall say, Depart," etc.

The first living creature, then, like a lion, denotes the first Gospel, contemplating the Gospel dispensation as a kingdom.

The import of the second emblem, "a calf," is that of sacrifice ; or, as it is found in Ezekiel, "the face of an ox," it denotes labour. According to this latter, the Jewish people, under the yoke of the law of works, is said by the Fathers to be figured by the ox. Solomon says, "There is much increase by the strength of the ox."

S. Mark, ministering to the Apostles, found in our Lord's active service his point of contemplation. His miraculous birth is omitted, the adoration of the Magi, and all notice of the childhood of Christ. All that tells of grandeur is put aside. The title "Lord" is only in one place given to Christ in this Gospel, and in this passage it is supposed by the best critics of MS. and different versions to be only an interpolation, and not to have existed in the best readings. It is in the reply, "Lord, I believe." The main characteristic of this Gospel is the haste from one event to another. The word, *ευθως*, "forthwith," or "immediately," is used about thirty times in this Gospel, as betokening the alacrity of Christ's service. His taking the babes in His Arms, His taking

Peter's mother-in-law by the hand, His taking the deaf and dumb boy by the hand and lifting him up, are peculiar to this Gospel.

The discourses are never long in this Gospel, but as of one who was much occupied with active work. The energy of Christ's service is shown in such passages as this: "In the morning, rising a great while before day," etc. In two different places in this Gospel it is mentioned that there were so many coming and going that our Lord and His disciples had not so much time as to eat bread. This is spoken of in no other Gospel. The emblem of the calf or the ox signifies the sacrifice of a life of active ministrations to the wants of men, as exhibited in the life of Christ our Lord.

The third living creature had the face as of a man. The meaning of this is interpreted to us by the text, "I will draw them with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love."

S. Luke, a Gentile, dwells on the things that pertain to the whole human race. His genealogy of our Lord goes up to Adam. It is he who records of Mary that all generations or nations shall call her blessed; that Christ is a light to enlighten the Gentiles; that remission of sins is to be preached in His Name among all nations.

Again, the compassion of our Lord, as man, is in no other Gospel so prominent. Hence such parables as the Prodigal Son, the Lost Sheep, the Lost Piece of Money, the Good Samaritan, the Publican and Pharisee; our Lord's pardon of the woman that had been a sinner,

of the thief on the cross ; and His praying for those who crucified Him, are only mentioned by S. Luke. He it is that particularises all that is human in our Lord ; His increasing in age, His being brought up at Nazareth, His being lost for three days when twelve years old. The human side is brought out also in the frequent mention of our Lord being at prayer. He was praying when, after His baptism, the Holy Ghost descended on Him. In another place He is said to have passed all the night in prayer. Peter's confession of Him as the Christ was in a place where "He was alone praying." He was transfigured as He was praying. The Lord's Prayer was given after He had been praying. He says to Peter, "I have prayed for thee." Our Lord appears in an attitude of dependence on God, almost like an ordinary man. Here alone it is mentioned that in His Agony there appeared to him an Angel from heaven, strengthening Him.

Repeated mention is made in this Gospel that our Lord sat down to meat. Even after His Resurrection, it is recorded how He ate a broiled fish and a piece of a honeycomb. By the centurion's testimony, He is called a righteous man ; and in this Gospel only He says, as He dies, "Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend My Spirit." Besides the parables of pity for the lost, in no other Gospel are such numerous instances given of our Lord's pity for the ills of the body, in miraculous healing of disease. In these traits appears the face of a man as the third emblematical representation of His life.

The fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. "The way of an eagle in the air," says Solomon, "is too hard for me." Job says, "The eagle mounteth up and maketh her nest in high places; her eyes behold afar off." God Himself is compared by Moses (in Exodus xix. 4, and Deuteronomy xxxii. 11) to the eagle. And again, God says to His people, "I have carried you on eagles' wings."

S. John was one of the privileged three drawn closer round our Lord, a favoured witness of the Transfiguration, the Agony in the Garden, and other scenes; the beloved disciple who leaned on the Bosom of Jesus at the Supper. He alone stood by the Cross, had the keeping of the Lord's holy Mother entrusted to him, and recognised our Lord after the Resurrection at the Sea of Tiberias. Aptly fitted, then, was he for the loftiest contemplation. The Godhead of our Lord is his theme.

In the very exordium of his Gospel he tells how the Word was God, and that all things were made by Him, and that He was made Flesh, or Man, and dwelt amongst us. He brings out in a striking light the meanness of the greatest prophet ever born of woman, compared with our Lord, as not worthy to loose the latchet of His shoe. In this Gospel our Lord calls Himself the Water of Life, the Bread of Life, the Vine, or principle of life, His life being an internal principle in man, not external, as the light of instruction. Christ, in his Gospel, says, "We will make Our abode in him, "assuming the same prerogatives to Himself as God the Father."

He says that all are to "honour the Son even as they honour the Father." He says, "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before?" "Before Abraham was I am;" "I and My Father are One." His adversaries are recorded to have gone back at His word, and fallen to the ground. An exalted tone is perceived in His answers to Pilate. In this Gospel only is the confession of S. Thomas, "My Lord and my God."

The fourth living creature, then, denotes, by the symbol of the eagle and the eagle's eye, the exalted contemplation of the Godhead.

All commentators are agreed that the face of the eagle symbolises S. John's Gospel. To which Gospels the other symbols are to be applied is debated amongst the Fathers. The most natural application seems the one above given. It is agreed by critics that S. Matthew's Gospel was written first, and S. John's last. The earliest catalogues give the other two Gospels their present places. Each Evangelist made his Gospel with a certain aim and plan, looking at Christ and His Church from a particular point of view. The portrait, however, thus given never excludes entirely the features that are painted by the other Evangelists with more of prominence. The kingdom, the active sacrifice of self, the kindly human charity, and the Godhead of Christ appear in each and all, like the four faces of the cherub in Ezekiel. But as leading characteristics, the first living creature is like a lion, and the second like a calf, the third having the face, as it were, of a man, and the fourth like an eagle flying.

XLI.

The Word of God.

"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light to my paths."

OF the many good gifts which the bounty of our God has bestowed upon us, one, which we have to be especially thankful for, is the treasure of His holy Word. All other spiritual books speak the language partly of nature and partly of grace, but in the Holy Scriptures God speaks His own thoughts after His own manner. For those holy men of old who spoke and wrote, did not do so by their own will, or after their own conceptions and ideas, but as they were inspired by the Holy Ghost. It was God Himself who spoke by them. Their tongues and their pens were but His instruments. Their utterances were not their own, but His. It was God's Word they spoke, revealing to men His designs concerning them, shedding a light upon the path in which they should walk, and guiding their feet into the way of peace. It is for this reason David says, "Thy Word, O Lord, is a lamp unto my feet, and a light to my paths."

The Word of God traces the race of man up to its very cradle. In the very infancy of his history, probably, men were guided by God to put on record the story of Creation, of the Fall, and of the other incidents which are related in the first few chapters of the Book of Genesis. From intrinsic evidence, it is the opinion of the best commentators that these earlier parts of the Book of

Genesis were written by inspired men previous to the time of Moses. All that Moses had to do was to gather together those links that had been previously made ready to his hand, continuing the work that had been begun, and setting it in distinct order. God knew that it would be of great advantage to men to have some written record, stamped with His own authority, of His thoughts and His plans with regard to themselves. This He supplied to them by inspired writings. In these writings men's sins and virtues were registered, and God's dealings and action with respect to them. Far more clearly, however, did the Word of God shine upon the pathway of mankind, when, through Moses, God published His Divine law to the children of Israel, His chosen people. The light of the natural conscience was but very dim and feeble, when compared with that given by the words of this revealed law. These words, therefore, as a rule of life, were to be continually kept in mind. "Thou shalt meditate upon them," says Moses, "sitting in thy house, and walking on thy journey, sleeping and rising. Thou shalt bind them upon thy hand, and write them in the entry, and on the doors of thy house." The writings of the Prophets and other books of Holy Scripture, do but amplify and develop the Word of God as it is found in Moses. The word is in substance the same, though varied, or fuller, in its mode of expression. It is this Word of God that our Lord so often appeals to, as bearing witness of Him. "Moses," He says, "wrote of Me. If you do not believe his writings, how shall ye believe

My words?" He reproaches the Jews in another place because, though they had the Scriptures, which bore testimony of Him, yet they did not come to Him that they might have life. The Sadducees He upbraids as in error from not knowing the Scriptures. To His own disciples He unfolds, in all the Scriptures, the things spoken concerning Himself.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Apollo is praised as "mighty in the Scriptures." The Bereans are said to be noble, because they received the Word with all eagerness, daily searching the Scriptures. S. Paul congratulates Timothy as having known the Scriptures from a child, "which," he adds, "can instruct him to salvation." S. Peter, speaking of the word of prophecy, exhorts his disciples to attend to it as to "a light that shineth in a dark place." All that has here been said has reference to the Word of God in the Old Testament Scriptures. These oracles of God were the guiding star to the pilgrims in the darksome valley of this life. By them the safe way was pointed out to the ancient Saints, and they all joined with David in saying, "Thy Word, O Lord, is a lamp unto my feet, and a light to my paths."

The New Testament Scriptures complete the Old, and are more precious still. The Word of God is not only spoken there by inspired men, but by God Himself made man. The Saints of the new dispensation have ever shown themselves very very grateful for the gift of the Written Word, thus bestowed upon them. S. Cecily, we are told, always carried in her bosom the Book of the

Gospel as an inseparable companion. S. Chrysostom says that all heresy proceeds from ignorance of the Holy Scriptures. S. Jerome is unwearied in exhorting to the study of Scripture. "Love Holy Scripture," he says to Demetriade, "and wisdom will love you ; cherish her, and she will save you." He uses similar language in writing to his other spiritual children. It was to enable them to gather a greater fulness of the sense of the Sacred Word that he composed those learned commentaries, which have been of such great advantage to the Church of God. S. Thomas, of Villanova, laid his clergy under a strict precept to study the Bible well. S. Alphonsus Liguori, in his instructions to preachers, counsels them to disesteem the flowers of rhetoric and the reasonings of philosophy, and rather to rely on the authority and light of God's Word. "I have found," he says, "by experience that a text of Holy Scripture has far more influence than the most subtle eloquence or wisdom." In his book of "Reflections on the Passion," he also says : "Nothing can so powerfully move the hearts of Christians to love God as God's own words on this subject recorded in the Holy Scriptures." How should it be otherwise, seeing that they are the direct voice of God to men ; so that when one of the Fathers of the desert had on a time received a letter from the Emperor, he said to his disciples, "Think it not strange, or so great an honour, that the Emperor should have written to me, since, in the Holy Scriptures, we have an Epistle from God Himself, the King of Heaven."

Oh, how great reverence the Saints always paid to the Divine Scriptures! S. Charles Borromeo never read the Scriptures but upon his bended knees. The constitutions of the Cistercian Order command the Monks to read the Holy Scriptures kneeling upon their knees with all humility, and if they think it irksome to continue the whole of their reading in this posture, they must at least do so for some few verses. The glorious S. Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury, before beginning to read the Bible, always kissed its pages with deep respect. The same thing did also Father Lacordaire, that great light of the Dominican Order. He had the Bible also always on his table, and after his Mass was over he retired to his chamber to read it. He was assiduous in recommending its study to others. Towards the close of his life, he said one day to his spiritual children, "I have read this book for thirty years, and every day I discover in it new lights, new depths. How different it is from the word of man. That is drunk up at a single draught, but the Word of God is a bottomless abyss. Every word seems to me like a flash of lightning giving new consolation." It was with the medicine of God's Word that the sweet S. Gertrude gave balm to the afflicted souls that waited on her for comfort. She had the words of Scripture so by heart, that she could always bring forth a passage from this treasury, to exhort or persuade any one to what was good.

Even unbelievers have revered Holy Scripture. Diderot and Rousseau gave to the Bible the most

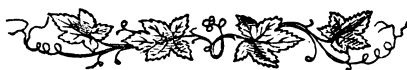
honourable place amongst their collections of books. The Jews have such respect for the books of the Old Testament that in their synagogues they keep a lamp continually burning before the chests in which they are stored up. Homer was but a man, yet Alexander the Great kept his works in a casket of costly wood, adorned with gold and gems.

Oh, how powerful an instrument is God's Word in banishing vice and building up virtue ! Our Lord told S. Teresa that the wickedness of the men of her days came from their ignorance of the truths of Holy Scripture. Junius was reclaimed from atheism by reading the first chapter of S. John's Gospel : "In the beginning was the Word," etc. S. Antony was converted by hearing one day in church the sentence, "Go, sell all thou hast, and give to the poor." He at once carried out the precept. S. Augustine and his friend, Alypius, were converted by the reading of a passage of S. Paul's Epistles. The like we read also in the lives of other Saints. S. Benedict, in his Rule, cries out : "What page or discourse of the Divine authority of the Old and New Testament is there, which does not stand as a most perfect pattern of life to man?" By reading and meditating on these Divine oracles men grow up into sanctity. The pious Alphonse, King of Arragon, during his life had read the Scriptures throughout, with Catholic commentaries, as many as fourteen times over. Protestants have brought God's Book into contempt by their false and unauthorised interpretations of its sayings, but in itself the Word of God is free

from the smallest admixture of error. Catholics are not subject to the same danger, because they are guided to its true meaning, in accordance with the teaching of Holy Church. God's Word, therefore, to them reflects the pure, clear, light of the Divine Wisdom, as a beacon on their heavenward track.

O Lord God, I thank Thee for this gift of Thy Holy Word. Give me the grace ever to read it in the same Spirit with which it was written : with humility, simplicity, and faith ; not through vain curiosity.

Speak to me, O Lord, by Thy Word, for behold Thy servant heareth. Let Thy light shine upon me, for I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Let not Moses speak, let not Samuel speak, but speak Thou to me with that inner word which gives light to the understanding. For they only provide the shell, but Thou discloseth the sense. Let Thy speech therefore distil as the dew into the ears of my soul, and let Thy Word be a lamp unto my feet, and a light to my paths.



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